



LIVING HOPE
BIBLE CHURCH

Church Bylaws

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Sarasota, FL
November 2021

Since it pleased Almighty God, by His Holy Spirit, to call us to unite here in the year 2021 under the name "Biblical Church 'LIVING HOPE'" in Sarasota, Florida, for the worship of the Triune God and the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we hereby organize ourselves in accordance with the Florida Nonprofit Corporation Law and adopt these Bylaws as our governing articles, which shall always be interpreted to reflect the character and glorify Jesus Christ, as portrayed in Scripture and articulated in the Doctrine and Covenant of this church.

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ARTICLE 1. Name

Section 1. The church shall be known as "Living Hope Bible Church." In this constitution, it is referred to as "LHBC" or "the church."

Section 2. Living Hope Bible Church is a conservative Baptist church and adheres to the classical Baptist doctrine. The foundation of LHBC's doctrine is the Bible in its natural, historical-grammatical interpretation, as well as the teachings of the Baptists of Russia edited by N.V. Odintsov (1928).

Section 3. Additionally, LHBC shares the common Baptist principles that express the fundamental elements of Baptism:

Point 1. The Holy Scriptures are the only rule and guide in all matters of faith and life.

Point 2. Religious freedom for all.

Point 3. The Church of God consists solely of regenerated individuals.

Point 4. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are reserved exclusively for believers.

Point 5. Autonomy and independence of each local church.

Point 6. The priesthood of all believers.

Point 7. Separation of church and state.

Section 4. Regarding matters of marriage and sexuality, LHBC adheres to the traditional biblical view expressed in the document "LHBC Position on Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Sexuality."

ARTICLE 2. Purpose

Section 1. LHBC exists by the grace of God, under the authority of the Word of God, for the glory of God, which is its ultimate purpose.

Section 2. The purpose of LHBC is to glorify God by making, growing, and multiplying disciples of Christ in ways prescribed and consistent with the teachings of the Bible as expressed in the Statement of Faith, Constitution, and Church Covenant, namely:

Point 1. Regularly gather together for worshiping God and mutual edification.

Point 2. Equipping the saints through instruction and study of the Bible.

Point 3. Proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ through preaching, holy living, personal evangelism, and any other means consistent with the teachings of the Bible.

Point 4. Observing the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Point 5. Encouraging biblical fellowship among believers and fostering Christian relationships.

Point 6. Establishing new churches among different nationalities and peoples.

Point 7. Cooperating with other churches for mutual strengthening and encouragement toward biblical faithfulness and purity.

ARTICLE 3. Membership

Section 1. Membership in LHBC is a privilege, not a right.

Section 2. Membership requirements and admission process:

Point 1. Members of LHBC can only be believers in Jesus Christ who have experienced spiritual rebirth.

Point 2. They must have been baptized by immersion as believers in obedience to Christ.

Point 3. They must express full agreement with the doctrines of LHBC as expressed in the Statement of Faith, as well as with this constitution.

Point 4. They must commit to fulfilling the obligations expressed in the Church Covenant.

Point 5. The process of becoming a member includes filling out a membership application, an interview with one of the elders, attending a new members' class, and any other requirements deemed necessary by the elders.

Point 6. A candidate is accepted as a member of LHBC by decision of the Elder Board and subsequently presented at a member/family meeting.

Point 7. No member of LHBC may remain a member of any other church.

Section 3. Expectations of Church Members:

It is expected that members will actively participate in the life of LHBC:

Point 1. Responding to God's great love for humanity demonstrated through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, each member of the church commits to regularly engage in prayer and the study of Scripture, seeking to know God's will and gaining the necessary strength to live out that will in their personal lives.

Point 2. Regularly attending corporate Sunday worship services.

Point 3. Faithfully observing the ordinances of Christ, namely baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Point 4. Submitting to church discipline and instructions.

Point 5. Joining one of the small groups for personal interaction with fellow brothers and sisters, as well as for fellowship and mutual service.

Point 6. Attending member/family meetings.

Point 7. Voting on matters within the jurisdiction of the membership assembly.

Point 8. Applying their various gifts for the edification of LHBC.

Point 9. Actively and willingly participating in the financial/material life of the church in proportion to their personal income.

While tithing is not a mandatory requirement in the New Testament, we acknowledge that giving one-tenth of one's income aligns with biblical teaching on proper financial stewardship and generosity. Material stewardship is not a burden but an act of worship and gratitude towards God for His care and provision, as well as an opportunity to serve God through the financial support of His church's ministry.

Point 10. All members of the church can contribute to the formation of the overall church development strategy by presenting their suggestions and observations to the Elder Board, as well as collectively discussing and making decisions within the jurisdiction of the membership assembly.

Point 11. Those who are not members of LHBC cannot lead any ministry or hold any position within LHBC.

Section 4. Termination of Membership:

Point 1. Matters of membership and church discipline are handled by the Elder Board of LHBC, involving the church as much as necessary in the process.

Point 2. Termination of membership should be promptly noted by a responsible servant in the event of a member's death. It should also occur if a member desires to leave LHBC to join another evangelical church. Any member wishing to withdraw

their membership from LHBC must complete a membership withdrawal form and submit it to one of the members of the Elder Board.

Point 3. The Elder Board has the right to deny a member's request to leave or transfer to another church for the purpose of continuing the process of church discipline or for any other reason deemed necessary or reasonable by the Elder Board.

Point 4. The Elder Board has the authority to apply disciplinary measures to its members, up to and including excommunication from the church, in cases of heretical deviation, neglect of the duties listed in Articles 3, Sections 2 and 3, or guilt in sinful behavior that brings dishonor to Christ or His church. Such actions should be carried out in accordance with the instructions of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17 and the guidelines provided by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 and 2 Corinthians 2:6-8.

Point 5. Church discipline may be expressed in the form of one-on-one confrontation, confrontation before witnesses, church-level confrontation (reprimand), as well as excommunication from the church.

Point 6. The purpose of church discipline is sincere repentance of the offender, their return to Christian conduct, restoration of their relationship with the Heavenly Father and fellow believers, and protection of other believers from temptation and the influence of sin.

Point 7. If the offender repents of their sin and desires correction, the Elder Board has the right to assign them mentors to provide practical assistance. In this case, church discipline is suspended until the final results of the mentoring process.

Point 8. If the offender expresses repentance but does not demonstrate the fruits of repentance (turning away from sin), church discipline should escalate (move to the next levels) until its goals are achieved.

Point 9. If the offender does not repent of their sin or does not desire correction, the Elder Board (after 30-90 days of reprimand) must make a decision to excommunicate the individual from the church. In such cases, the offender is declared excommunicated, removed from the church membership list, deprived of pastoral care and church support, and loses the right to participate in church ministry and partake in the Lord's Supper, and may even be prohibited from attending Sunday gatherings if deemed necessary by the Elder Board.

Point 10. At the discretion of the Elder Board, church members under church discipline may be suspended from serving in the church. Members under reprimand do not have the right to serve in the church, participate in the Lord's Supper, and lose their voting rights in membership assemblies.

Point 11. Church members who systematically violate this constitution or do not attend worship services and membership assemblies without valid reasons for three months may be excluded from the LHBC membership list. Such a decision is made

by the Elder Board after careful examination of all facts, followed by informing the membership assembly.

Point 12. Church discipline can also be extended to individuals who are not formal members of LHBC but consider themselves Christians and regularly attend LHBC worship services and other events. If such individuals clearly lead a sinful lifestyle or propagate teachings contradicting the Scriptures or the documents listed in Section 1 of this constitution, the Elder Board may deprive them of the privilege to attend LHBC worship services and events and prohibit them from interacting with LHBC members.

Point 13. If a church member who is under church discipline demonstrates sufficient evidence of repentance, they will be restored to membership with subsequent notification and prayer during a membership assembly.

ARTICLE 4. Church Governance

Section 1. Church Membership Assembly

Point 1. Each membership assembly is appointed and planned by the Church Board, and conducted by one of the church elders appointed by the Church Board. The secretary and audit committee are appointed at the discretion of the Church Board.

Point 2. Every church member aged 16 and above has the right to vote on decisions regarding various church matters within the competence of the membership assembly. This right is exercised through participation in the discussion of church matters and voting at membership assemblies. These matters include:

- 2.1** Adoption of the church constitution and making amendments;
- 2.2** Approval of members of the Board of Elders;
- 2.3** Approval of the church budget for the year;
- 2.4** Making decisions regarding real estate (acquisition, construction, transfer, exchange, etc.);
- 2.5** Other matters that require significant financial expenses or result in global changes in the life and ministry of the church.

Point 3. Current operational issues of the church are not within the competence of the membership assembly but are resolved by the Board of Elders with subsequent information provided to the church members as necessary.

Point 4. Decisions of the membership assembly are considered legitimate if no less than 50% of the listed members of the church participated in the vote.

Point 5. Decisions of the membership assembly are effective if they receive a simple majority, i.e., 50% + one vote of those who participated in the vote. Exceptions are:

5.1 Election of a new lead pastor. For this, the consent of no less than 3/4 or 75% of the voting members is required;

5.2 Election of a member to the Board of Elders. For this, the consent of no less than 3/4 or 75% of the voting members is required.

Point 6. Vote counting is conducted by a counting committee appointed by the Board of Elders.

Point 7. Any church member not under church discipline may initiate a discussion on a particular issue at the Board of Elders or the membership assembly. The submitted proposals should address the following points:

7.1 Clear formulation of the proposal or observation;

7.2 Biblical, logical, or practical basis for the adoption of the proposal;

7.3 Explanation of how the proposal will contribute to the edification of the local church;

7.4 Description of the resources (financial, time, personnel) required to implement the proposal;

7.5 If the proposal or observation concerns other individuals, whether it has been discussed with them should be indicated;

7.6 Name and contact phone number of the proposal's author;

7.7 The proposals should be handed over to any member of the Board of Elders.

Point 8. Each proposal or observation is registered by the secretary of the Board of Elders and considered by the Board of Elders at the earliest opportunity.

Point 9. The author of the proposal may be invited to attend a meeting of the Board of Elders where their proposal will be discussed.

Point 10. A decision is made by the Board of Elders regarding each submitted proposal or observation. The results are communicated primarily to the author and, if the Board of Elders deems it necessary, the matter is presented for discussion at the membership assembly.

Section 2. Board of Elders

Point 1. The Board of Elders is the primary governing body of the church, responsible for strategic matters concerning the life and ministry of the church. These matters include:

1.1 Doctrinal foundation of the church;

1.2 Philosophy of ministry of the church;

1.3 Determination of the overall strategic development of the church;

1.4 General organizational structure of the church's ministry;

1.5 Organization of ministry councils, addition of new departments, or dissolution of existing ones as necessary;

- 1.6** Selection, training, and approval of church workers and leaders at various levels;
- 1.7** Provision of pastoral care and accountability for all workers within any of the ministry councils;
- 1.8** Implementation of pastoral care over specific ministry blocks;
- 1.9** Preparation of the agenda for membership assemblies and conducting such assemblies as needed;
- 1.10** Matters of official church discipline;
- 1.11** Presentation of the budget, developed by the finance committee, to the membership assembly for discussion and subsequent approval;
- 1.12** Oversight of budget execution and financial discipline, including the appointment of the auditing committee and conducting regular audits of accounting and expenditure;
- 1.13** Approval of the level of material compensation and benefits for church staff;
- 1.14** Matters of adding new paid positions in the church or reducing existing ones;
- 1.15** Coordination of the general schedule of events conducted by various ministry departments of the church;
- 1.16** Preparation of the annual ministry plan and making necessary changes to it when needed;
- 1.17** Resolving conflicts that arise between ministry departments or their leaders;
- 1.18** Representation of the church in governmental and administrative bodies;
- 1.19** Matters of inter-church cooperation.

Point 2. The members of the Board of Elders can only be spiritually mature brothers who meet the qualifications of an elder/pastor/bishop as presented in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9, and 1 Peter 5:1-3.

Point 3. The number of members on the Board of Elders is based on the number of qualified ministers whom God nurtures and calls to pastoral ministry. According to 1 Peter 5:1-3, Acts 20:28, and Philippians 1:1, all pastors are elders, and all elders are called to pastoral ministry in the church. However, due to different roles and responsibilities, not all elders need to be equally gifted, equally educated, financially supported, or ministers of the Word as mentioned in 1 Timothy 5:17.

Point 4. The election of Board of Elders members is conducted as needed at the discretion of the Board of Elders, following the following conditions:

- 1.1** Candidates are nominated by the existing Board of Elders from among the ministers who have demonstrated their qualifications and faithfulness in the work of one of the ministry councils of the church.
- 1.2** Each candidate is considered by the existing Board of Elders to assess their alignment with the qualifications outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9, and 1 Peter 5:1-3. The final list of candidates is presented for approval to the membership assembly.

1.3 The date and procedure for electing Board of Elders members, as well as the approved list of candidates, are announced in small groups within the church for prayer and possible remarks at least one month prior to the vote at the general meeting of church members.

Point 5. A member of the Board of Elders may be removed from their position due to physical incapacity to participate in the work of the board, loss of spiritual qualification, disagreement with the church's doctrine, inability to serve as an example of spiritual maturity for the church, or other reasons that make their service impossible.

1.1 In the case of accusations of sin against an elder, they are only accepted if there are two or more witnesses, according to 1 Timothy 5:17-20.

1.2 The final decision regarding the removal of an elder from their position in the Board of Elders is made unanimously by all members of the existing Board of Elders, with subsequent notification of the church.

Point 6. A member of the Board of Elders may temporarily suspend their service in the Board due to personal health, family circumstances, missionary service, spiritual crisis, studies, etc. For this, they must communicate their request to one of the members of the Board of Elders.

1.1 The suspension of service should be discussed and approved by a decision of the Board of Elders.

1.2 An elder who has suspended their participation in the Board of Elders does not have voting rights in the board's proceedings during the approved period.

1.3 Upon the completion of this period, the Board of Elders must reassess their alignment with the spiritual qualifications of an elder/pastor/bishop as presented in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9, and 1 Peter 5:1-3. Afterward, they may resume their service in the board.

Point 7. The senior pastor of the church serves as the leader of the Board of Elders. Their first assistant acts as the deputy leader.

At the discretion of the Board of Elders, one of the elders may be appointed as the chairman of the Board for a designated period. Their responsibilities include preparing the agenda and conducting the board meetings.

Point 8. The Board of Elders elects a secretary from among its members, whose duties include keeping records of all board meetings. These records should reflect the following information: the meeting's location, time, attendance list, agenda, all proposals, and decisions made on each discussed matter. All records must be diligently stored and maintained.

Point 9. If the matter under consideration concerns a member of the Board of Elders, they cannot participate in the voting process.

Point 10. The Board of Elders may, as necessary, involve other church ministers without granting them voting rights in the decision-making process.

Point 11. The Board of Elders serves as the final arbiter in any contentious matters arising during the church's service, its departments, and individual members.

Section 3. Deacons and Deaconesses

Point 1. In order to ensure effective service in the church, deacons and deaconesses may be elected as needed. Their primary task is to provide comprehensive assistance to the elders in carrying out their ministry for the edification of the church.

Point 2. Deacons/deaconesses must meet the characteristics presented in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. They should also have a good understanding of the doctrine and philosophy of ministry in the church, possess specific gifts of service, love for God and people, and the ability to work in a team.

Point 3. Deacons/deaconesses are elected by the Board of Elders based on the aforementioned requirements. This requires a unanimous decision of all members of the Board of Elders. Afterward, they are presented to the church for prayer.

Point 4. A deacon/deaconess may be relieved of their service in the event of loss of spiritual qualification, physical incapacity to participate in the service, or other reasons. This requires a decision by the Board of Elders.

Point 5. All deacons and deaconesses are accountable to the Board of Elders of the church in their work.

Point 6. Deacons/deaconesses are presented to the entire church for prayer once a year during a membership/family meeting.

Point 7. In accordance with the principles outlined in Acts 6:1-6 and Romans 16:1, deacons/deaconesses should not exercise spiritual authority but should support the ministry of the elders, work towards maintaining the unity of the church, and care for the physical needs of the church:

7.1 Caring for the sick, widows, mourners, elderly, and infirm.

7.2 Facilitating the ministry of hospitality within the church.

7.3 Serving and caring for church property.

7.4 Responsibility for the distribution of the charity fund, about which they should periodically report to both the Board of Elders and the church.

7.5 Preparing and maintaining worship spaces.

7.6 Assisting during the Lord's Supper.

7.7 Working in other areas as needed by the church.

Section 4. Volunteers

Any individual who wishes to serve in any area of church life must be a member of LHBC or, in exceptional cases, approved by the Board of Elders to participate in a specific ministry (for example, children of church members). Each volunteer should undergo an interview with one of the church's elders or the leader of the specific ministry and be prepared to undergo a personal background check.

Section 5. Ministry Councils

Point 1. In order to ensure effective service in the church, various ministry councils may be organized, each responsible for specific areas of ministry. Among them may be:

- 1.1** Youth Ministry Council;
- 1.2** Children's Ministry Council;
- 1.3** Worship Ministry Council;
- 1.4** Missionary Ministry Council;
- 1.5** Prayer Ministry Council;
- 1.6** Deacons' Ministry Council;
- 1.7** Other councils that contribute to the overall development and edification of the church.

Point 2. Ministry councils are responsible for addressing matters pertaining to their respective ministry departments.

Point 3. Members of the ministry council may include spiritually mature brothers and sisters who meet the characteristics of deacons presented in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. They should have a good understanding of the doctrines and philosophy of church ministry, possess experience in the specific ministry area, and be able to collaborate with other ministers as a team.

Point 4. Members of each ministry council are approved by the Board of Elders based on the aforementioned requirements from among brothers and sisters who have been actively involved in that particular area of church ministry. The election of each new council member requires the agreement of all members of the Board of Elders.

Point 5. Members of the ministry council may be removed from their position in the council in the event of loss of spiritual qualification, physical incapacity to participate in their work, or other reasons. This requires a decision by the Board of Elders.

Point 6. Each ministry council is directly accountable to the Board of Elders of the church in its work.

Point 7. The leader of each ministry council has the right, as necessary, to involve brothers or sisters who are actively involved in that specific ministry but are not yet permanent members of the council.

Point 8. The elders have the right, as necessary, to participate in the work of any ministry council.

ARTICLE 5. Administration

Section 1. Budget/Finances

Point 1. The church has an official status as a non-profit religious organization and enjoys the corresponding tax benefits provided by state laws.

Point 2. The budget of LHBC is comprised of voluntary contributions from church members, worship service attendees, private individuals, and various organizations interested in supporting the ministry of LHBC.

Point 3. All donations received by the church from private individuals or organizations are registered by name unless they are anonymous.

Point 4. The Board of Elders has the right to refuse to accept any gift or donation for the church if it determines that accepting such gift would contradict the overall well-being of the church or the purposes expressed in this constitution.

Point 5. Each donor has the right to receive an official document confirming the amount of their donations, except for those donations made anonymously.

Point 6. The overall expenditure plan for the year (church budget) is approved by the Board of Elders with prior notification to the church at one of the membership meetings.

Point 7. To prepare the budget in advance and monitor the financial status of the church, the Board of Elders appoints a finance committee from among its members, which is responsible for:

7.1 Preparing the budget for approval by the Board of Elders.

7.2 Regularly monitoring the overall financial state of affairs in implementing the church budget and informing the Board of Elders of any matters requiring immediate attention.

7.3 Studying the financial condition of each ministry department of the church to determine the most effective use of the church's material resources.

7.4 Conducting periodic audits of the church's financial activities to ensure proper use of funds and accurate financial record-keeping. Audits should be conducted at least once a year and may involve independent professional

auditors. The results of the audit are presented to the Board of Elders and, if necessary, to the membership assembly.

Point 8. The auditing committee is appointed by the Board of Elders. It must consist of no fewer than three individuals who possess the necessary qualifications, including education and work experience in the financial field, to examine the financial affairs of the church.

Point 9. Each member of the Board of Elders has the right to inspect any financial documents of the church if there is reasonable doubt about their accuracy or reasonable suspicion of any financial misconduct.

Point 10. Special (non-budgeted) collections for specific needs, such as supporting missionary work or responding to emergency situations affecting LHBC members, may be conducted in the church. Such collections can only be initiated by a decision of the church's Board of Elders.

Point 11. Only individuals authorized by a special decision of the Board of Elders have the right to officially represent the church in government, administrative, financial, and other organizations, as well as to sign any legal or financial documents on behalf of the church. This decision must be recorded in the minutes and confirmed by issuing a special document as evidence. This authority may be general or specific to certain individual situations. Without the special decision of the Board of Elders, no church leader, member, or representative has the right to act on behalf of the church in any matters related to the church's government, administrative, or financial obligations. The church is not liable for any obligations undertaken by individuals who do not have the authority confirmed in writing.

Section 2. Treasurer and Accountant

Point 1. The church treasurer is appointed by the Board of Elders. Their task is to maintain strict records of the church's financial inflows and outflows.

Point 2. The church accountant (bookkeeper) is appointed by the Board of Elders. Their responsibilities include the documentation related to the church's financial activities. The accountant is responsible for timely and accurate payment of taxes and other financial obligations in accordance with state laws.

Point 3. The treasurer must provide reports on all financial transactions and the financial status of the church to the Board of Elders at least once a month or whenever requested. The treasurer is also responsible for presenting regular reports on account balances, income, and expenses of the church at regular membership meetings.

Point 4. The treasurer can be relieved of their duties and re-elected by a decision of the Board of Elders.

Point 5. Neither an elder, nor a paid staff member of LHBC, nor a financial deacon is eligible to hold the position of treasurer.

ARTICLE 6. Amendments

Section 1. Approval of Doctrine and Church Covenant

All amendments to the Doctrine or Church Covenant must be proposed by the Board of Elders and subsequently approved by 3/4 of the members voting on the issue at any membership meeting.

Section 2. Bylaws

All amendments to these Bylaws must be proposed by the Board of Elders and subsequently approved by 3/4 of the church members voting on the issue at any membership meeting.

ARTICLE 7. Resolution of disputes

Section 1. All disputes arising between church members, ministers, or any other church staff concerning matters of spiritual doctrine, church practices, traditions, church finances, or property must be resolved by the Board of Elders. Decisions shall be made after prayerful examination of the matter in the spirit of meekness and humility, with each member of the Board showing respect for the position of others and esteeming one another above themselves.

Section 2. Decisions made by the Board of Elders on matters within its jurisdiction are final and can only be reconsidered by the Board of Elders.

ARTICLE 8. Dissolution

Section 1. Decision for Dissolution and Closure

In the event that the elders of LHBC determine that there is a justifiable reason for the dissolution of Living Hope Bible Church as a corporation, they shall make the decision and notify all church members in writing.

Section 2. Dissolution Process

After the decision by the Board of Elders to dissolve the church as a corporation, all assets must be transferred to another church or organization whose purposes align with the objectives of LHBC as established in Article 2.