

GRAND AVENUE BAPTIST CHURCH OF AMES, IOWA BY-LAWS

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ARTICLE 1

PURPOSE

The purpose of this church shall be to endeavor to glorify God, (cf. Romans 11:36, 16:25-27; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Peter 4:10-11), revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Scriptures, obeying his directive for the Church recorded in The Gospel According to Matthew, 28:18-20.

ARTICLE 2

SCRIPTURE

We believe Scripture to consist of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. We believe Scripture to be inspired by God, (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 2:13), and inerrant in the original manuscripts. We further believe that Scripture, when properly translated from existing textual evidence and interpreted according to sound principles for interpretation, can and should be understood and applied. Therefore, we believe that the Bible is our ultimate authority in all matters pertaining to the faith and practice of the members of this church.

The following guidelines are intended to help all of us to handle Scripture in a manner consistent with its intended purpose, (cf. 2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Peter 3:14-18; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Romans 15:4-6).

1. Take to heart what Scripture is. We believe that Scripture is

Inspired by the one, true God
Timeless in the truth it reveals
Accurate in all that it was intended to communicate
Consistent with itself
Authoritative for believers

(See Matthew 22:29; John 5:17-20; Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 14:37-38; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2:13; 4:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:16-21)

2. Submit to the working of God's Spirit.

Understanding and applying the Bible accurately is a dynamic process of interaction with the Biblical text and the Spirit of God who inspired it. Therefore, this process requires regeneration (Spiritual birth) and a willingness to live out what God reveals as truth.

(See Proverbs 1:7; John 8:31-32; 14:21; 15:5; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; Ephesians 1:15-19; 3:14-21; Philippians 2:12-13; 2 Timothy 1:13-14)

3. Strive to understand the meaning God intended through the human authors to the intended recipients of those words.

Though the Bible is timeless in nature, the revelation it discloses was given through men in various ways to particular persons in history (cf. Hebrews 1:1-2). Properly understanding what God intended to

communicate requires diligent study of the passage's context, history, culture, literary form, grammar, syntax, and the accumulated theological understanding in the day of the writer and original recipients. Though some parts of the Bible are hard to understand, and professional training is helpful in interpretation, we believe God's revelation was given through the normal conventions of human language so that it could be understood by all. The Bible itself most often proves to be the best source of this background information and every member is encouraged to assume their personal responsibility before God to become intimately familiar with its content.

(See Nehemiah 8:7-8; Acts 17:10-12; 1 Corinthians 10:6,11; 1 Timothy 1:6-7; 2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Peter 3:14-18)

4. Make application to our lives today from the intended meaning of the text.

We believe that any unit of Scripture has one overall intended meaning, but there may be many legitimate applications. Nevertheless, a person's application should follow and be derived from his understanding of intended meaning. (Note: This is not to deny that the Holy Spirit may prompt attitude changes, give encouragement, or work with an individual by using a Bible text they read whether or not they understand the intended meaning of that text. However, authoritative applications being claimed on the basis of Scripture must be consistent with the intended meaning of that portion of Scripture and not inconsistent with clear teaching found elsewhere in the Bible.)

(See Matthew 22:29; John 5:37-47; 1 Timothy 1:3-11, 3:14-15, 4:1-9; 2 Timothy 2:14-3:17; 2 Peter 3:14-18; 1 John 2:3-6, 4:1; and the example of early Christians in Acts and the New Testament letters.)

ARTICLE 3

MEMBERSHIP

SECTION 1. QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

Members shall have experienced spiritual birth through personally and solely trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation, as described in the New Testament, and shall have been immersed in water, symbolizing death to their old life and the beginning of a new life under his authority. (The baptism requirement is waived for those requesting watchcare affiliation--see section 7.) Prospective members shall testify to and members shall continue to evidence the reality of their conversion experience by seeking to wholeheartedly obey Jesus Christ as the Lord of their lives.

SECTION 2. RECEIVING MEMBERS

Anyone desiring membership shall complete a membership request form, indicating any previous church affiliations and signifying their willingness to be interviewed by an officer of the church. The purpose of an interview would be to ascertain that the person requesting membership is indeed qualified (see above). The need for such an interview will be determined by the elders. The elders may undertake other action to determine if the person is qualified for membership which may include but not be limited to conversing with church members who know the individual requesting membership, contacting leadership in any church they had previously been affiliated with, or even to publishing the person's name in a church newsletter or bulletin soliciting the input of other church members who may know them. Once the elders are assured beyond reasonable doubt that the candidate is qualified, the person shall be granted membership by the body of elders.

On the request form, individuals requesting membership will indicate their desire to join by one of the following methods:

- a. A profession of personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and being baptized by this church.
- b. A statement that they have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for their salvation and have followed this experience of spiritual birth by being baptized (immersed) for the purpose of signifying this experience.

In cases where the person requesting membership is a member of another church, an attempt will be made to determine if they are in good standing with that church and to notify them that the individual is requesting membership with us. If they are not in good standing with their former church, a part of the membership process may include encouragement to resolve any outstanding conflict and may delay their being granted membership in this body indefinitely.

Watchcare affiliates will be able to retain their membership in a previous church simultaneously with their association with this body once approved by the elders. No notification to such a church will be required.

The names of all people granted membership by the elders shall be communicated in a timely way to the church as a whole.

SECTION 3. RELEASING MEMBERS

Any member shall cease to be a member of this church when any of the following occurs:

- a. A request for transfer of membership to another church is received. A release letter will be granted by the church unless the member is under church discipline. The church secretary shall inform the requesting church about the participation of the former member. The church secretary shall report all requests for membership transfers to the elders. The elders in a regular scheduled meeting shall review the letters granted.
- b. We are made aware and are able to confirm that the individual has been received into the membership of another church or of a religious organization of another faith. Confirmation can be oral or written and may be supplied by a credible person(s) other than the individual concerned.
- c. An oral or written request to terminate membership is personally presented by the individual to any of the elders, or when a written, signed and dated request to terminate membership is submitted to the church office for presentation to the elders. A request to terminate membership is not subject to a decision of the elders to become effective.

The elders along with other members who have a close relationship with the person have the responsibility to communicate with the member, if possible, and make reasonable effort to resolve any problems or differences. Any member who leaves in good standing must follow the normal procedures outlined in Section 2 of this Article to again become a member.

- d. Death.

The names of all people released from membership shall be communicated in a timely way to the church as a whole.

SECTION 4. SUSPENDING MEMBERS

The elders shall make a reasonable attempt to locate those members who have been absent from all public meetings of the church for a period of one year. Those members who cannot be found after a reasonable attempt has been made, shall be removed from the church's membership, and their names retained for record purposes only.

Those members who are located by the elders and fail to give sufficient reason for non-attendance and/or fail to resume attendance shall constitute sufficient reason for the elders to remove the person from the church's membership and retain their name for record purposes only.

The names of all persons suspended from membership by the elders shall be communicated in a timely way to the church as a whole.

SECTION 5. HANDLING CONFLICT AND THE DISCIPLINE OF MEMBERS

We affirm that conflicts will arise in the course of our life together as a church. This was the case in the first century as it is today. From the Scriptures we can discern appropriate ways for dealing with such conflict. We should not “agree to disagree” on significant issues, but continue to love one another and positively pursue oneness in Christ and His word even though we may disagree for a time. True unity can be experienced with this kind of heart commitment.

At the same time we must acknowledge that there will continue to be disagreements among us concerning a wide variety of relatively insignificant matters. Since we are a diverse group, maintaining right relationships will involve patiently accepting each others’ differences when Biblical truth is not compromised. (cf. Romans 14:1-15:6 and see “Types of conflict and how to handle them” below.)

We commit as a church family to follow the basic instruction of our Lord and His apostles as outlined below.

- A. **Basic instruction of the Lord Jesus and His Apostles for resolving conflict.** (See Matthew 5:21-26; 18:15-20; Luke 17:3; John 17; Ephesians 4:25-32; Colossians 3:12-13; and I Timothy 5:19-22. The book of Proverbs is also filled with practical wisdom for handling interpersonal conflict.)
 - a. **Deal with conflict as quickly and prayerfully as possible.**
 - b. First attempts to resolve should be **with the person(s) directly involved directly in the conflict.**
 - c. Only after personal attempts have been unsuccessful, **2 or 3 other members from the church should be enlisted to help facilitate resolve.**
 - d. If attempts to resolve with the help of others proves to be unsuccessful, then **the church should act as judge between the parties involved and withdraw fellowship from the unrepentant offender(s) if necessary to encourage repentance and resolve.**
(Note: Though not explicitly addressed in Scripture, we believe it would be wise in most cases for the matter to be brought before the church’s elders prior to a hearing and decision of the church as a whole.)

- B. **Types of Conflict and How to Handle Them.** In Acts and the New Testament letters of Paul it seemed that there were 3 primary areas of conflict.
 - a. **Non-teaching issues.** Examples of non-teaching issues include appearance of the church’s physical property, details of a proposed church budget, or routine ministry decisions of church leadership. (cf. Acts 15:36-41; Romans 14:1-15:7.) We acknowledge a degree of freedom in attempting to resolve these conflicts as long as the basic instructions of our Lord in Matthew 5:21-26 and 18:15-20 are not violated.
 - b. **Sin/misconduct.** Examples of misconduct include those found in 1 Corinthians 5, (the church member involved in an illicit sexual relationship) and in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 (church members leading an unruly life). In these situations the ultimate course of action would involve the church’s disassociation from the offender(s). Again, the progression of attempts to resolve the conflict would need to follow the steps outlined

by our Lord in Matthew 5 and 18.

- c. **Teaching issues.** Examples of teaching issues include how a person is justified before God, who Jesus Christ is, or how the Old Testament laws relate to the life/conduct of the church, (cf. Galatians, Colossians, Ephesians and 1 Timothy). The basic principles do not change but are acted upon in slightly different ways in these situations. For example, false teaching that has been spread through the body by an individual or a group would warrant that those ideas and persons be refuted in the context of corporate teaching opportunities, (cf. 1 Timothy). Also, some additional instruction applies when the offender(s) is an elder, (cf. 1 Timothy 5:17-21).

Church discipline in the form of disassociation from a member is always the final step in the process. Church discipline is not punishment. Punishment focuses on payment for the past while discipline looks to a person's future betterment, their repentance and re-commitment to living consistently with Scripture. Church discipline should only be exercised when matters are serious, clearly violating Biblical truth. At a minimum, such a decision will require a three-fourths majority vote of at least a quorum of adult resident members in a special or regular congregational meeting. Attendance at any congregational hearing of such cases and/or meeting to decide a course of action will be limited to those eligible to vote and any other persons whom the elders decide should be present. Church discipline in this form will terminate the person's membership. Until repentance is evidenced and restoration to membership is granted, our records will show the individual as a former member who is under church discipline.

If a person under church discipline requests membership again, the elders will seek to determine if there is sufficient evidence of repentance. If so, the elders will bring a recommendation to grant membership to the person in a special or regular congregational meeting. Attendance at any portion of a congregational meeting devoted to deciding whether or not to grant membership to someone who is under church discipline will be limited to those eligible to vote and any other persons the elders decide should be present. Upon a minimum of a three-fourths favorable vote of at least a quorum of adult resident members present at such meeting, the individual will be restored to membership.

SECTION 6. MEMBERSHIP RECORD

All membership records shall be retained permanently either in an active membership file or in a membership file archive. These records shall indicate whether or not the person is currently a member, whether or not current members are resident or non-resident, how he/she was received into membership, how those released from membership were released, and those who have been suspended or are under church discipline. Non-residents are those members who moved and coincident with the move ceased to attend. All others are resident members. This definition shall not prevent residents and non-residents from residing in the same community. The church secretary and any others enlisted from among or by the elders shall periodically review the current church membership record.

SECTION 7. WATCHCARE AFFILIATION

Students or other Ames area residents who have received Jesus Christ and who confess Him as Savior and Lord may request watchcare affiliation in order to be under the spiritual protection and authority of a new testament church. The process for requesting association with the church as a watchcare affiliate is the same as for regular membership described above in section 2.

Watchcare affiliates are not members and cannot participate in the business process or hold a leadership office in the church. They may, however, be allowed to serve alongside church members in a wide variety of official church ministries in a non-leading capacity. Because of this, disciplinary action will be exercised toward a watchcare affiliate by the same process as applies to members. Baptism is not a prerequisite for watchcare affiliation, but anyone requesting baptism by Grand Avenue Baptist Church shall become either a member or a watchcare affiliate of this or another local church in order to give evidence of a commitment to a local body of believers in Christ. The church secretary shall keep a separate record of watchcare affiliates.

When an individual moves away from the Ames community their watchcare affiliation with the church is automatically terminated. Watchcare affiliation can also be terminated in the same manner as members are released (Section 3) with the exception that letters of release will not be provided upon affiliation with another church.

ARTICLE 4

CHURCH GOVERNANCE

In January 1995, an elder form of church governance was formally instituted at GABC. The Biblical basis and practical reasons for GABC having chosen to follow this form of governance, and the two main principles underlying an elder form of governance, are as follows.

SECTION 1. BIBLICAL BASIS FOR AN ELDER FORM OF GOVERNANCE

Eldership best harmonizes with and promotes the true nature of the New Testament Church. Pastoral oversight was provided by a council of elders in nearly all the initial New Testament churches. These local churches were spread over a wide geographic and culturally diverse area—from Jerusalem to Rome.

Elders most often served local bodies of believers, e.g.,

Churches of Judea and the surrounding area (Acts 11:30; James 5:14, 15), and in Jerusalem (Acts 15).

Pauline churches established in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Acts 14:23); Ephesus (Acts 20:17; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-25); Philippi (Philippians 1:1); and Crete (Titus 1:5).

Several churches in northwestern Asia Minor, e.g., Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1; 5:1).

SECTION 2. PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF AN ELDER FORM OF GOVERNANCE

The practical benefits of having more than one elder in each church are as follows:

Having a plurality of elders adds pastoral wisdom and balances pastoral weaknesses. No one church leader is broadly gifted enough to cover all ministry areas equally well. A church with several leaders—whose gifts, passions, and abilities complement one another—can provide more well-rounded and competent leadership for people to follow.

Having a plurality of elders diffuses congregational criticism and the possibility of “us’ versus ‘him’” attitudes. If a church has one well-defined leader, he often alone takes the brunt of criticism in the church. Tough decisions can be misperceived and motives can be misconstrued. Because the leader is perceived to be making all the decisions and casting all the final votes, an unhealthy “us’ versus ‘him’” mentality can crop up. He can thereby become isolated and almost the exclusive target of critical remarks. With a plurality of church leaders, different ones can stand in the gap of criticism, as they collectively take responsibility for the issues being criticized.

Having a plurality of elders provides a built-in mechanism for stimulating and facilitating growth of leadership among members of the body. It does this because it roots leadership in non-staff members. This is important because Jesus desires that “everyone” be a minister in His church. Further, a congregation needs to be able to function and continue to grow—even if something were to happen to its paid pastor(s).

Having a plurality of elders facilitates corrective discipline of members involved in scandalous sin. Performing corrective church discipline requires a leadership structure that won’t buckle under the spiritual and relational pressures of the process. By adding wisdom, diffusing criticism, balancing pastoral weakness, and rooting leadership in non-staff members, plural eldership helps transfer the load of corrective discipline across “multiple pillars.”

SECTION 3. PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING AN ELDER FORM OF GOVERNANCE

The two main principles underlying an elder form of governance are as follows:

The principle of “co-equal authority among elders,” which means—in principle—that the opinion of any one elder has no more weight than the opinion of any other elder.

The principle of “first among equals” (*primus inter pares*)—which allows for functional, gift-based leadership among the elder team without creating an official office of a “leader” over fellow-elders.

CHURCH OFFICERS

This church recognizes two primary groups of officers, called elders and deacons, who are selected from among the church’s membership (cf. Acts 20:17-35; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-3; Hebrews 13:17; et al. and see Sections 1 and 2 below). Other members besides elders and deacons may be recognized, affirmed and encouraged to give leadership to some aspect of the church’s ministry, though they will be accountable to a deacon(s) and/or elder(s), and ultimately to the church as a whole for that leadership (See Section 3 below). A current listing of Elders, Deacons, and Ministry Leaders is displayed in the church’s Policy & Procedures Manual.

SECTION 1. ELDERS

The elders are the overseers (“shepherds”) of this local church. Though the elders may share or delegate some of the tasks related to fulfilling their responsibilities with other members of the church, we believe that before God they have the authority and are ultimately accountable for giving pastoral leadership in the church. This church shall have at least five elders serving at any given time unless the congregation has temporarily suspended this requirement. A majority of the elders will not be vocational church pastoral staff. In addition, not all of the church’s vocational staff would necessarily be elders, though at least one of the vocational staff must be an elder.

A. Identification of Prospective Elders.

Men, to be considered as elders, can be identified in a number of ways. Avenues for recommending that certain men be considered are open to all adult resident members of GABC. These avenues are described in the church’s Policy & Procedures Manual.

B. Qualifications for Elders.

All elders must be Biblically qualified, male members of GABC. We affirm the use of 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 as primary passages for determining their eligibility to serve the body in this role. The emphasis of these qualifications is upon the type of man (in character, reputation, understanding and skill) who can be considered.

All prospective elders need to:

1. Allow church members to approach them, or the presently serving elders, about concerns or questions they may have about the prospective elder’s eligibility.
2. Interview with the presently serving elders to determine eligibility.
3. Participate in a public question and answer forum with the church family, to give all an opportunity to better know and discern the eligibility of the prospective elder.

C. Selecting Elders.

The presently serving elders are responsible to determine the church’s willingness to affirm a man being considered for the office of elder. This will include, but not necessarily be limited to, a three-fourths favorable vote of at least a quorum of the adult resident members. The elders have the authority to discern and not recommend or confirm those they believe

are Biblically unqualified. The church family retains the responsibility to select, from among those recommended to it, those who will actually serve. The timing of this process is flexible in order to give the elders and the church the freedom to select men for service in this role whenever they are ready. The details of the selection process are indicated in the church's Policy & Procedures Manual.

Once a prospective elder has received a three-fourths favorable vote of the church and has been confirmed by the presently serving elders, he will immediately begin his service in this role. All new elders will participate in a special commissioning service held by the church.

D. Tenure of Elders.

The tenure of all elders, except possibly a vocational staff member, will be limited. The minimum term of service for an elder will be three years. An elder may serve a maximum of six consecutive years, after which he must take at least a one-year sabbatical. Following a sabbatical he may return to service as an elder through an abbreviated selection process, as indicated in the church's Policy & Procedures Manual. Whether the sabbatical provision may be waived for a particular vocational staff member will depend on the outcome of a vote by the body in response to a recommendation by the elders. Current elders should be aware of the need to identify and help train potential new elders. Former elders who continue to worship at GABC will continue to be considered as elders. On occasion, they may be asked to undertake special assignments.

Within the permitted term of service all elders must continue to meet the Biblical qualifications, be available and willing to serve, and continue to be affirmed by the church. However, if any one of the following conditions occurs, his term of service will be ended.

1. He has ceased to be Biblically qualified. Any offense against an elder should be handled by the procedures outlined in the Article entitled, "Handling Conflict And The Discipline Of Members". Any accusation against an elder must be brought to the rest of the elders by two or more members after personal attempts to resolve conflict have failed (1 Timothy 5:19). If for whatever reason resolve is not possible in a hearing before the elders, the matter can be brought before the church. At whatever point a church vote indicates that we believe the elder in question is no longer qualified, he will be dismissed. This dismissal is irrespective of any decision concerning the person's membership status.
2. Because of personal life circumstances he is no longer available for service. He himself, his fellow elders and/or the church as a whole may recognize his inability to actively assume his responsibilities as an elder and urge him to resign his office. Our desire would be that such a resignation be voluntary. However, the church could, with or without the recommendation of the rest of the elders, by a three-fourths majority vote of at least a quorum of members in a regular or special congregational meeting dismiss the elder from office.

If it is perceived by the rest of the elders that such an action by the church is not based on accurate information, is motivated by unresolved personal conflicts or is an unhealthy action for the church to take without sufficient prayer and communication among the members, the elders may require a maximum of a 60-day delay in the time scheduled for the vote and require that quorum be increased to 20% of the adult resident members. (See the article concerning "Church Decision Making" below.)

3. He voluntarily resigns from his office because he no longer desires to serve. Such a resignation must be in writing, signed, dated and be submitted to the elders to be effective. Any resignation of an elder must be reported to the church in a timely manner. If a resignation causes the number of elders to drop below five and/or causes the majority of elders to be vocational pastoral staff, the elders will have 90 days to recommend for the church's selection any other men who are qualified and willing to serve. If this process fails to bring the number of elders to five or more and/or fails to restore the balance of staff and non-staff elders required by these By-laws, the church will be given the opportunity to temporarily suspend the By-law requirement until other men can be trained and affirmed by the Church.
4. For reasons other than qualifications or availability, the congregation appeals to the elders for a vote to dismiss the elder(s) in question. (See the Article concerning "Church Decision Making" below.) A valid

appeal would require a vote within 60 days and dismissal of the elder(s) in question would require a three-fourths majority vote of a least 20% of the adult resident members. Such a vote would indicate a sufficient lack of fellowship and warrant the elder's dismissal regardless of the reason.

E. Elder Responsibilities.

Elders are responsible for ensuring that the flock is:

“Fed,” i.e., elders are responsible for teaching God’s Word. Through such teaching/discipling, the flock receives protection, guidance, leading, nourishment, & comfort (1 Tim 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9).

“Protected,” i.e., elders are to protect the flock from false teachers, and they are to seek lost sheep (Acts 20:17, 28-31).

“Led,” i.e., elders’ overall function is to provide pastoral oversight of the local church, including leading the flock. “Leading” includes governing, directing, managing, and being stewards over the flock. Elders are not to be autocratic in bringing leadership to the congregation (Psalm 78:70-72; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

“Cared for,” i.e., elders are responsible for ensuring that the practical needs of local church members are met. Caring for the flock includes praying for the sheep; visiting the sick; comforting the bereaved; strengthening the weak; visiting new members; and providing counsel (Ezekiel 34:1-6; Acts 20:35; James 5:14).

F. Elder Decision-Making Authority

Though primary decision making responsibility and authority lies with the church’s elders, it is expected that this group of men will make reasonable effort to keep church members informed of decisions made. This will include but not be limited to the following:

1. In general, Elders’ Meetings are open to any resident member who may wish to attend. Such members should simply indicate to one of the elders their desire to attend, and their desire to present a matter for consideration (if any). Decisions will be made by consensus, and reports will be received from the deacons and ministry leaders. Members of the church present in this meeting may speak to any decision item before its approval. Minutes of Elders’ Meetings will be made available to the church within one week of their being approved.
2. The elders may meet in closed meetings for dealing with personal and confidential matters as often as necessary. Decisions will be made by consensus of at least a quorum of elders. Discrete minutes will be made available to the church in a timely manner.
3. The elders will initiate annual congregational meetings for reporting on the past year’s activities as well as any present and future plans, and for recommending the approval of decisions on restricted items. Elders shall initiate, as necessary, other congregational meetings to discuss and make decisions on pertinent items. The elders should involve the deacons and all other ministry leaders of the church as appropriate in annual and other meetings.

The following definitions and restrictions apply to the decision-making of elders.

In line with the principle of co-equal authority among elders, which means—in principle—that the opinion of any one elder has no more weight than the opinion of any other elder, elder decisions are to be based on “spiritual consensus”—rather than on formal voting. This approach is responsive to Paul’s challenge of mature Christians seeking to become “like-minded” and standing “firm in one spirit” (Philippians 1:27; 2:2).

A “restricted” item is a matter that is specifically reserved for affirmation by vote of the congregation in a regular or special congregational meeting. As of the date of these current By-laws, the elders’ decision-making authority is restricted in the following areas:

1. Selecting and dismissing elders and deacons.
2. Hiring or dismissing church staff.
3. Approving the church budget (Though they will be involved in the process of formulating the budget, each annual budget and any amendments to the same will require a favorable vote of the church.).
4. Authorizing the appropriation of church funds, except as provided for within the budget and church policy.
5. Making long-range decisions that would encumber church funds or alter the ownership and/or use of church property, without the expressed approval of the congregation.

In at least these five areas, the adult resident members of the congregation will be given the opportunity to authoritatively vote on the items being recommended. (See the Article entitled "Church Decision-Making" below.)

Biblically, the elders have the ultimate responsibility to teach and guard sound (healthy/accurate) instruction in the church. Therefore, the elders will have decision-making authority in doctrinal matters. Any desire on the part of the church to challenge a teaching of the elders that is being claimed to be accurate to Scripture must follow the same process of resolve as for any offense.

G. Elder Development/Training.

The elders will be expected to continue their own development in character, wisdom, and ministry skill. The church should seek to encourage that development in its leaders in tangible ways.

SECTION 2. DEACONS

Deacons are ministry leaders who give attention and oversight to special areas of need in the life of the church. This differentiates them from elders who have general oversight and shepherding responsibility for the church. Though they may be given a great deal of freedom to function, deacons are accountable to the elders and ultimately to the church for their leadership. (See Acts 6:1-7; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13; et. al.)

A. Identification of Prospective Deacons.

As with elders, men to be considered for service as a deacon could be identified in a number of ways. Avenues for recommending that certain men be considered are open to all adult resident members of GABC. These avenues are described in the church's Policy & Procedures Manual.

B. Qualifications for Deacons.

All deacons must be Biblically-qualified, male members of GABC, with a heart for service. We affirm 1 Timothy 3:8-13 as the primary passage for determining their eligibility to serve the church in this role. All prospective deacons need to:

1. Allow church members to approach them or the elders about concerns or questions they may have about the prospective deacon's eligibility.
2. Interview with the elders to determine eligibility.

C. Selecting Deacons.

The elders will be responsible to discern needs for setting apart men for specific ministry oversight in the role of deacons. Depending on existing areas of need at various points in time, the list of deacon positions in the church may change.

Presently serving elders will be responsible to determine the church's willingness to affirm a man being considered for the office of deacon. The details of the process by which deacons are selected are included in the church's Policy & Procedures Manual. Approval by the body will require a three-fourths favorable vote of at least a quorum of the adult

resident members. The elders have the authority to discern and not recommend or confirm as deacons those they believe are Biblically unqualified.

Once a prospective deacon has received a three-fourths favorable vote of the church and has been confirmed by the presently serving elders, he will immediately begin his service in this role. All new deacons will participate in a special commissioning service held by the church.

D. Tenure of Deacons.

The tenure of all deacons will be limited. The minimum term of service for a deacon will be three years. A deacon may serve a maximum of six consecutive years, after which he must take at least a one-year sabbatical. To ensure a smooth and effective transfer of responsibilities, each deacon is expected to have identified and discipled an apprentice. In this way, when his term of service is completed, a replacement will be prepared and ready for consideration to serve as a new deacon—in taking over his predecessor's responsibilities. Following a sabbatical, he may return to service as a deacon through an abbreviated selection process, as indicated in the church's Policy & Procedures Manual.

E. Deacon Responsibilities.

Deacon responsibilities are determined by the need for which they are set apart. Because considerable Biblical attention is given to qualifications of "deacons," and no such attention is focused on "other ministry leaders"—deacons bear heavier responsibilities in this church than "other ministry leaders." Because the qualifications of deacons center on their being effective in interpersonal communication, deacons are entrusted with positions involving people-oriented ministry. In most cases, these positions involve some element of overseeing and shepherding "other ministry leaders" in directly-related areas.

F. Deacon Decision-Making Authority.

A deacon's decision-making authority will be limited to what is reasonably necessary to perform his responsibilities. If specific budget line items are associated with particular deacons, they are responsible for approving expenditures against the line items. Each deacon will be accountable to a designated oversight elder. The frequency with which an oversight elder meets with a deacon will depend on their mutually perceived need for doing so. On an as-needed basis, but not less than once every 6 months, the deacons as a group will meet—for general coordination and recognition—with the elders as a group.

G. Deacon Development/Training.

The deacons will be expected to continue their own development in character, wisdom, and ministry skill. The church should seek to encourage that development in its leaders in tangible ways.

SECTION 3. MINISTRY LEADERS

Other members of the church may be recognized, affirmed and encouraged to give leadership to specific areas of church ministry. These leaders may be recruited by elders or deacons as needed to provide the leadership base necessary for the most effective ministry of the church possible.

A. Identification of Ministry Leaders.

Members of the church may volunteer to serve as Ministry Leaders. In addition, adult resident church members can recommend for consideration people they believe to be qualified to serve in particular areas.

B. Qualifications for Ministry Leaders.

Ministry Leaders must be members of GABC, and should have shown demonstrated competence in the areas of responsibility represented in their potential leadership positions.

C. Selecting Ministry Leaders.

Members of the church are encouraged to use “My ‘SHAPE’ Profile, GABC” to help identify their suitability for different areas of possible church ministry. Their interests in serving in church ministry should be reflected on a “Ministry Opportunity Survey Form, GABC.” The information provided on these forms can then be used by elders and deacons in determining who might be most suitably qualified to serve as a Ministry Leader. In addition, elders and deacons can directly explore with suitably qualified church members their interest in possibly serving in particular Ministry Leader positions.

D. Tenure of Ministry Leaders.

The tenure of Ministry Leaders will be flexible. To ensure a smooth and effective transfer of responsibilities, each Ministry Leader is encouraged to have identified and discipled an apprentice, so that when her/his term of service is completed—a replacement is prepared and ready to take over her/his responsibilities.

E. Ministry Leader Responsibilities.

The responsibilities for Ministry Leaders are determined by the needs for which they are set apart.

F. Ministry Leaders’ Decision-Making Authority.

Ministry Leaders’ decision-making authority will be limited to what is reasonably necessary to perform their responsibilities. If specific budget line items are associated with particular Ministry Leaders, they are responsible for approving expenditures against the line items. Each Ministry Leader will be accountable to a designated oversight deacon or elder.

G. Ministry Leaders’ Development/Training.

The elders and the church should be supportive of those serving as Ministry Leaders. Appropriate avenues for equipping and encouraging them for service should be made available.

ARTICLE 5

CHURCH DECISION MAKING

When the nature of a decision being made requires a vote of the church, the following definitions and guidelines will apply, unless specified otherwise in these By-laws.

A. Quorum

1. A quorum of this church will be regarded as 10% of the current adult resident members present and voting at any regular or special congregational meeting. “Adult” means at least 18 years of age.
2. A quorum of elders shall be two-thirds of those actively serving in that role.

B. Voting

1. Votes of the church can be taken either by a show of hands or by written ballot at the discretion of the moderator of the church’s congregational meeting. There will be no voting by proxy. Absentee votes will not be accepted unless the elders deem it would be wise to do so on a particular matter. A decision to allow absentee voting would need to be made by the elders at least two weeks before a vote is to be taken and reasonable attempts should be made to inform the congregation of this change in voting procedure.
2. A three-fourths majority vote of at least a quorum of members is needed to approve an item.

Efforts should always be made on the part of all to preserve the unity of the church without compromising its overall purpose. (See John 17; Ephesians 4:1-3; Philippians 2:1-5; et. al.) In light of this responsibility, the elders along with the church may choose to table a motion or a decision if it is believed to be necessary to accomplish Christ's purpose in and through the church.

C. Congregational Meetings

1. Regular congregational meetings will be scheduled at least annually by the elders of the church. Notice of the regular congregational meeting date needs to be made by mail to each resident member household at least two weeks before such a meeting. A list of decision items for which a congregational vote is necessary or desired should be made available to members at least one week in advance of that meeting unless a longer period of notice is required for an item addressed in these By-laws.
2. Special congregational meetings may be called at any time by the church's elders. If a church vote is needed or desired in any special congregational meeting, a list of items for vote must be made available at least one week prior to that meeting, unless a longer period of notice is required for an item addressed in these By-laws.

D. Moderator

The moderator for any congregational meeting may be any one of the elders or any willing member enlisted by them.

E. Rules of Procedure

1. The moderator shall provide an agenda for any congregational meeting in cooperation with the elders and secure its approval as the first item of business. Any member wanting a decision to be brought before the church for a vote must submit that item in writing to the elders in advance of the meeting, and the one week notice requirement met if the elders approve adding it to the agenda. Any decision item may be added to the agenda of any congregational meeting by a three-fourths favorable majority vote of those adult resident members present and voting in such a meeting and an affirmation by at least a quorum of the elders.
2. The moderator will give every adult resident member who wishes to comment on a decision item the opportunity to do so. To maintain orderliness in the meeting, the moderator will recognize who may address the congregation at any given moment.
3. The moderator may limit debate after a reasonable amount of time has been allowed for every person wishing to comment on a motion.
4. Any motion may be amended.
5. The congregation may choose to postpone and/or refer a motion to a leadership group or person in the church. This has precedence over voting on the motion itself.
6. If he believes it will promote church harmony, the moderator may divide a motion so that the parts are discussed and decided separately.
7. All motions shall be decided by a 3/4 majority unless other provisions are made in these By-laws.
8. Every attempt should be made to follow church leadership within scriptural limits. No vote will be considered conclusive if a quorum of the elders oppose it. With the exception of restricted decisions (see the section addressing the decision making authority of the elders), only in the

process of appeal may a congregational vote override a decision of the elders.

F. Process of Appeal

The congregation may require that a matter be brought before it for an authoritative vote through a process of appeal. A valid appeal must be made to the elders in writing and signed by at least 10% of the adult resident members. A congregational meeting must be scheduled within 60 days for the purpose of voting on the appeal. In such cases, quorum will be raised to 20% of the adult resident members. A 3/4 majority favorable vote of those adult resident members present and voting will be necessary to affirm the appeal. Decisions made through the appeal process are not subject to approval of the elders.

ARTICLE 6

FINANCES

SECTION 1. BUDGET FORMULATION

Each year, the leadership team responsible for overseeing church finances, hereafter referred to in these By-laws as the finance team, shall request detailed budget proposals from those responsible for lines in the budget. These proposals shall itemize all proposed expenditures for the next fiscal year. These proposals shall be reviewed by the elders and other church leaders prior to a formal recommendation to the church.

SECTION 2. BUDGET APPROVAL

The finance team shall cooperate with the elders to bring a formal budget recommendation to the church for a vote in a regular or special congregational. Approval of the budget by the church shall constitute approval for expenditures for every item having to do with

1. missions,
2. paid church staff,
3. utilities,
4. insurance,
5. office supplies, and
6. literature used in various church ministries.

Those responsible for other items in the budget are authorized to spend per month no more than 25% of their approved budget (for items detailed in that budget) without the finance team's approval. Additional expenditures must be approved by the finance team and reported to the church in the next regular congregational meeting. In no case may commitments be made in excess of the amount budgeted for any line item without prior church approval.

SECTION 3. SUBSEQUENT CHURCH ACTION

Church action shall not be taken on any matter requiring an expenditure of money until those responsible for the line item from which it would be taken have had an opportunity to consider the matter except where substantial spiritual or financial loss is imminent and would occur as a result of such delay. The budget may be amended at any regular or special congregational meeting.

SECTION 4. OTHER FINANCIAL MATTERS

The finance team shall maintain an accurate list of financial responsibilities and those who are assigned those tasks in the church's policy and procedures manual.

ARTICLE 7

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

There are two symbolic observances that the Lord Jesus commanded that his followers practice. (See Matthew 28:19, Luke 22:19-20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

1. Baptism symbolizes one's death to the old sinful life and having been raised to a new spiritual life in Christ. Baptism is immersion in water. Persons desiring to be baptized must have experienced spiritual birth through personally and solely trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation as described in the New Testament.
2. The Lord's Supper symbolizes the body and blood of Jesus Christ given for the forgiveness of our sins. Any Christian may participate in this observance.

ARTICLE 8

AMENDMENTS

Changes in these By-laws may be made at any regular or special congregational meeting of the church, provided such amendments shall have been proposed in writing at least two weeks in advance and mailed to every resident member household.

These By-laws have precedence over any previous action of this church, effective date adopted.

DATE: February 12, 1975 -- adopted
October 8, 1980 -- revised
August 11, 1982 -- revised
December 15, 1982 - July 13, 1983 -- revised
January 11, 1984 -- revised
August 8, 1984 -- revised
September 9, 1987 -- revised
October 14, 1987 -- revised

November 11, 1987 -- revised
August 9, 1989 -- revised
April 11, 1990 -- revised
September 21, 1994 -- revised
October 29, 2006 -- Article 4 revised
November 13, 2011 -- Article 4 & 6 revised