

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS**

**Final Draft – supersedes all other draft effective 04-27-2026**

**Current Constitution and Bylaws**

**Proposed Amendments**

**CONSTITUTION**

**PREAMBLE**

We, the members of Bethlehem Baptist Church (Gum Springs) Alexandria, Virginia, established in 1863 believe the Holy Bible to be the inspired Word of God. We agree to obey the teachings and guidelines that God has preserved in His Word. We consent, as the body of Christ, to be governed by the Holy Word of God, His Holy Spirit, and the following constitution and bylaws. We do ordain and establish this constitution of the Bethlehem Baptist Church.

**I. Name**

This body shall be known as the Bethlehem Baptist Church.

**II. Purpose and Powers**

Bethlehem Baptist Church is organized exclusively for religious, charitable, and educational purposes, including for such purposes, the making of distributions to organizations under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code (or corresponding section of any future tax code.). No part of the net earnings of Bethlehem Baptist Church shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to its members, trustees, directors, or other private persons, except that the Church shall be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of Section 501 (c) (3) purposes. No substantial part of the activities of the Church shall be the carrying on of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, and the Church shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of, or in opposition to, any candidate for public office.

Notwithstanding any other provision of these articles, the Church shall not carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (a) by a corporation/organization exempt from Federal tax under Section 501 ( c ) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code (or corresponding section of any future Federal tax code) or (b) by a corporation/organization, contributions to which are deductible under Section 170 ( c ) (2) of the Internal Revenue Code (or corresponding section of any future Federal tax code).

**No Change**

**II. Purpose and Powers**

Upon the dissolution of Bethlehem Baptist Church assets shall be distributed for one or more exempt purposes within the meaning of Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future Federal tax code, or shall be distributed to the Federal government, or to state or local government, for public purpose.

**III. Statement of Purpose**

The mission of Bethlehem Baptist Church is to spread God's Word among all people, recruit souls to Jesus Christ, and help Christians remain committed to Christ by:

- developing an understanding of the Word of God
- developing and/or enhancing their faith in God.
- developing faithful stewardship to God.

**Essential Components:** Preaching/Teaching/Fellowshipping/  
Witnessing/Acts of Benevolence/Praying

**Objectives:**

- To provide regularly scheduled worship services (**preaching**)
- To provide Biblical **teaching**
- To provide opportunities for Christian **fellowship**
- To encourage **witnessing** as a Christian's responsibility
- To promote **acts of benevolence**
- To promote the Word of God as **a guide for daily living**
- To encourage **stewardship** as the Christian's responsibility
- To encourage regular **prayer** as a means of submitting petitions to God

**IV. Statement of Basic Beliefs (Doctrines)**

We adopt the New Hampshire Articles of Faith as our statement of Basic Beliefs (a copy taken from The Directory for Baptist Churches, Revised by Edward T. Hiscox will be **Attachment A** to the constitution).

**NO CHANGE**

**III. Statement of Purpose**

**The mission of Bethlehem Baptist Church is to win souls to Christ, encourage a healthy relationship with God through discipleship, and be guided by the Holy Spirit in outreach ministries.**

**Essential Components:** Preaching/Teaching/Fellowshipping/  
Witnessing/Acts of Benevolence/Praying

**Objectives:**

- To provide regularly scheduled worship services (**preaching**)
- To provide Biblical **teaching**
- To provide opportunities for Christian **fellowship**
- To encourage **witnessing** as a Christian's responsibility
- To promote **acts of benevolence**
- To promote the Word of God as **a guide for daily living**
- To encourage **stewardship** as the Christian's responsibility
- To encourage **personal and corporate prayer** as a means of **communicating and communing with** God

**NO CHANGE**

**BYLAWS**

**NEW**

**Article I. - Church Membership**

**Section 1. General**

The membership shall be composed of any person who has asked Jesus into his/her life, has accepted Christ as Savior and Lord, has been baptized by immersion, and has demonstrated a willingness to accept and adhere to the rules and practices of Bethlehem Baptist Church.

**Section 2. Candidacy**

Candidates for membership shall publicly acknowledge their faith in Jesus Christ and be examined by the pastor and/or deacons who will discuss with the candidate the significance of their action and the decision made. A candidate may be accepted for membership by:

- baptism by immersion
- receipt of a letter of recommendation from another Baptist church
- Christian experience
- restoration (if having been gone from Bethlehem for less than six months)

The candidate, after being examined and found to be acceptable by the Pastor and Deacons, and following the completion of the Church's New Members Orientation Class, will be accepted into membership by receiving the right-hand of fellowship from the Church body.

**Section 3. New Members Orientation**

New members are encouraged to participate in the church's **New Members Orientation**. Said orientation must include training in:

- Stewardship
- The Constitution and Bylaws
- Leadership

**BYLAWS**

**Legend/Definitions:**

- **“Ex Officio”**: by virtue, or because of an office
- **In-person Worship Service/Bible Study**: is when a member is physically present at worship services and Bible study, etc.
- **Virtual Worship Service/Bible Study**: is when a member is not physically present at the church, but engages worship services and Bible study, meetings, etc., remotely via a smart phone, computer (desktop, laptop, iPad, etc.).
- **Hybrid Worship Services and Bible Study**: is when worship services and Bible study are available in-person and virtually.

**Article 1. – Church Membership**

**Section 1. Admission of Members**

Membership is open to any person who publicly acknowledges his/her faith in Jesus Christ and has:

- confessed with their mouths the Lord Jesus and believe in their hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 10:9),
- been baptized by immersion in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19),

Or on the basis of:

- receipt of a letter of recommendation from another Baptist Church,
- Christian experience,
- restoration (if having been gone from Bethlehem for six months) (Section 6), and
- reinstatement (Section 7).

Candidates will be examined by the Pastor or Deacons who discuss with them the significance of his/her action and the decision made. Upon being found acceptable by the Pastor or Deacons, and following completion of the New Member's Orientation, a candidate will be accepted into the membership by receiving the right-hand of fellowship.

**Note:** Individuals seeking membership have to demonstrate a willingness to accept and adhere to the rules and practices of Bethlehem Baptist Church.

**Section 2. New Member's Orientation**

New members are required to attend and complete the New Member's Orientation training via in-person, hybrid or virtually.

NEW

**Section 4. Rights of Members**

Active members are members in good and regular standing who are faithful to the duties of the church by: regular attendance at worship service of the church, support of the ministry, relief of the poor and spreading of the Gospel.

- Every active member of the church is entitled to vote on all questions submitted to the church, provided the member is present and on the current roster.
- Any active member of the church can be considered for an elective office by the church membership.
- Every member of the church may participate in the ordinances of the church.

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**Section 7. Reinstatement**

The church may reinstate to fellowship any person previously excluded, upon request of the excluded person and by a majority vote of the church upon evidence of the excluded person's repentance and reformation.

**Section 3. Attributes of Active Members**

Active members are members in good and regular standing who are faithful in regularly attending (in-person or virtual) worship services as well as meeting at least one of the conditions below:

- Support of the ministry (time, spiritual gifts, and treasure (finance))
- Aid in the relief of the poor (mission), or
- Spreading the Gospel (evangelism)

\*A member's record of giving is verified by submission of tithes and offerings.

Note: Members who are unable to regularly attend or view (virtual) worship services or otherwise do not participate attend or due to employment, military service, medical condition, or educational pursuits, etc., shall be considered active church members while the specified circumstances exist.

**Section 4: Rights of Active Members**

Active members who are present, have the right to:

- vote on all matters that come before the Church body,
- be considered for an elective office by the church membership and
- participate in the ordinances of the Church, i.e., baptism and the Lord's Supper/Holy Communion.

**Section 5. Attributes of Inactive Members**

Inactive members are members who for 6 months have:

- had no presence (attendance either in-person or virtually) in the life of the Church,
- no record of financial giving to the Church, and
- failed to respond to communications from the Deacons or contact the Church office regarding their absence.

Note: The names of inactive members shall be moved from the active membership roster to an inactive members' status with the date of entry when this status is determined.

**Section 6. Restoration of *Relationship* (Discipleship)**

Inactive members may be restored to the active membership (fellowship) upon:

- request for restoration,
- consultation with the Pastor and the Chair of the Deacon Ministry, with a recommitment to having an active presence in the life of the Church
- attending and completing an abbreviated New Member's Orientation training, and
- reintroduction to the Church body by the Pastor and receiving the righthand of fellowship.

**Section 7. Reinstatement**

The Church may reinstate to active membership (fellowship) any member previously excluded:

- upon request
- upon evidence of his/her repentance and reformation,
- by a majority vote of active members present at a Church business meeting, provided a quorum is met, and
- upon receiving the right hand of fellowship

**Section 6. Discipline**

It shall be the practice of Bethlehem Baptist Church to cultivate and cherish brotherly love for each member. When discipline is required, every reasonable measure will be taken to assist the member. The pastor and deacons are available for counsel and guidance.

Should some serious condition or matters of difference exist which would cause a member to become a liability to the general welfare of the church, the pastor and the deacons will take every reasonable measure whether public or private to resolve the problem in accordance with Matthew 18:15-17 and the written procedures found in The New Revised Directory for Baptist Churches by Edward T. Hiscox.

The attitude for reinstatement shall be one of redemption as taught in Galatians 6:1. After all proceedings have been followed with a spirit of Christian kindness and forbearance and it becomes necessary for the church to take action to exclude a member, a two-third vote of members present will be required. The church may proceed to declare the person(s) no longer in the fellowship of the church.

**Section 5. Termination of Membership**

Membership shall be terminated by (1) death, (2) dismissal to another Baptist church, or (3) erasure upon request or proof of membership in another church.

**Section 8. Membership Count**

A membership count shall be conducted at least every two years, to establish the active membership roster.

**Section 8. Discipline**

It shall be the practice of Bethlehem Baptist Church to cultivate and cherish brotherly love for each member. When discipline is required, every reasonable measure will be taken to assist the member. The Pastor and Deacons are available for counsel and guidance.

Should some serious condition or matters of difference exist which would cause a member to become a liability to the general welfare of the Church, the Pastor and the Deacons will take every reasonable measure whether public or private to resolve the problem in accordance with Matthew 18:15-17 and the written procedures found in The New Revised Directory for Baptist Churches by Edward T. Hiscox.

The attitude for reinstatement shall be one of redemption as taught in Galatians 6:1. After all disciplinary proceedings have been followed with a spirit of Christian kindness and forbearance and it becomes necessary for the Church to take action to exclude a member, a two-thirds vote of active members present will be required, **provided a quorum is met**. The Church may proceed to declare the person(s) no longer in the membership (fellowship) of the Church.

**Section 9. Termination of Membership Relationship**

Relationship with Bethlehem Baptist Church shall be terminated by:

- death,
- member's request or notification that the member has united with another Church, or
- exclusion due to disciplinary action by the Church.

**Section 10. Membership Count**

A membership count shall be conducted **annually for various purposes** including, but not limited to, the following:

- Establishing the active membership count of the church, and
- Planning ministry activities and church fellowship.

**ARTICLES II – CHURCH OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES**

All church officers, other than the Pastor, shall be elected every three years by the church body at a regular business meeting, provided a quorum is met.

**Section 1. Church Officers**

The officers of Bethlehem Baptist Church shall be the pastor, the deacons, the trustees, and the treasurer.

No individual shall hold simultaneously more than one office, with the exception of the treasurer whose responsibilities necessitate the person's being a trustee.

All church officers, other than the Pastor, shall be elected every three years by the church body at a regular business meeting, provided a quorum is met.

**A. PASTOR**

The pastor shall be in charge of the spiritual well being of the Church and act as supervisor of the general Church activities but at all times be responsible to the Church. The pastor is "Ex Officio" of the Church. The pastor is responsible to preach, teach, lead, discipline, and correct the membership of Bethlehem Baptist Church (II Timothy 3:16. 17 and 4:2) and to fulfill the duties as outlined in the contract agreement for "pastor." The pastor shall, also, assume responsibility for oversight of conduct, training, guidance, and orientation of the ministers of Bethlehem Baptist Church.

**Vacation and Leave of Absence**

The pastor shall receive a vacation; and leaves of absence in accordance with the contractual agreement.

In the absence of the pastor, the Chairman of the Board of Deacons shall assume the responsibilities of the pastor.

**Vacancy of Pastor**

Whenever a vacancy of pastor occurs, a pastor shall be chosen and called by the church. A pulpit committee shall be formed to search for and recommend a pastor for the church.

The committee shall be composed of the Chairman of the Board of Deacons, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Superintendent of the Sunday school, and six other members to be elected by the church membership. The committee shall elect a chairman and a secretary from their number and establish policy for the nomination of pastor. The committee shall report to the church its progress from time to time. Any church member has the privilege of making nominations for the office of pastor to the pulpit committee in accordance with its established policy.

**ARTICLE II – CHURCH OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES**

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All church officers, other than the Pastor, shall be elected every three years by the church body at a regular business meeting, provided a quorum is met.

**A. PASTOR**

The Pastor shall be in charge of the spiritual well-being of the Church and act as supervisor of the general Church activities but at all times be responsible to the Church. The Pastor is "Ex Officio" of the Church. The Pastor is responsible to preach, teach, lead, discipline, and correct the membership of Bethlehem Baptist Church (II Timothy 3:16. 17 and 4:2) and to fulfill the duties as outlined in the covenant with the Pastor. The Pastor shall, also, assume responsibility for oversight of conduct, training, guidance, and orientation of the ministers of Bethlehem Baptist Church

**Vacation and Leave of Absence**

The Pastor shall receive vacation and other leave of absence in accordance with his/her covenant with Bethlehem Baptist Church.

In the absence of the Pastor, the Chair of the Deacon Ministry assume the responsibilities of the Pastor.

**Vacancy of Pastor**

Whenever a vacancy of Pastor occurs, a Pastor shall be called by the Church. A Pulpit Search Committee (PSC) shall be formed to search for and recommend a Pastor for the Church.

The PSC shall be composed of the Chair of the Deacon Ministry, or his/her Deacon designee, the Chair of the Trustee Ministry, or his/her Trustee designee, the Director, Education Ministries, and six other members to be elected by the church membership, by a three-fourths vote of active members present, provided the quorum is met.

The PSC shall elect a Chairperson and a Secretary from their number and establish policies and procedures for recruiting a Pastor. The PSC shall report to the congregation its progress whenever the PSC's timeline benchmarks are met, providing status updates consistent with the benchmarks schedule.

**Pastor Recommendation**

When the pulpit committee has a recommendation(s), it shall give at least 15 days' notice of the meeting at which time it will submit its report. Salary and provisions shall be agreed to by the Joint Board and approved by the church body.

**Church Vote**

The church shall vote on the recommended person(s) by ballot. An affirmation vote of three-fourths of those present is necessary for pastor election.

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Any active member has the privilege of nominating candidates for the Office of Pastor to the PSC according to the PSC's established policy. The PSC will direct the active member on how his/her recommended candidate may apply for the vacancy of Office of Pastor.

**Candidates for Pastor Recommendation**

When the PSC has a recommendation(s), it shall give at least 15 calendar days' notice to the body of the meeting at which time it will submit its report. The PSC will rate the candidates and only one candidate shall be brought before the church by the PSC at a time in sequence of the highest rating to the next lowest on a list not more than three candidates.

**Church Vote**

The church shall vote on the recommended person(s) via anonymous ballot. Only active members are eligible to vote. An affirmative vote of three-fourths of active members present is necessary for the election of the Pastor, provided a quorum is met.

The candidate receiving a three-fourths vote is the candidate elected, and no other candidate shall be presented before the congregation as candidate for Pastor.

**\*Contingency Vote:**

In the event that none of the best qualified candidates brought before the congregation meet the three-fourths vote threshold, a contingency vote of a two-thirds majority vote may be used to enable the Church to approve a candidate from the existing pool of best qualified candidates for Office of Pastor.

The same requirements for selecting a candidate under the three-fourths rule apply under the two-thirds rule.

**Pastor Elected**

The pastor elected shall serve until the relationship is terminated by his request or the church's request. He shall preside at meetings of Bethlehem Baptist Church and serve as moderator in all business meetings in keeping with Robert's Rules of Order. (see page Pastor, page 6.)

**New**

**Resignation/Dismissal from the Office of Pastor**

The pastor may resign from the office of pastor in accordance with the criteria stated in the contractual agreement.

The church may dismiss the pastor of duties when it becomes evident that the incumbent is no longer fulfilling the responsibilities as outlined in the contractual agreement or for misconduct. The guidelines set for in Matthew 18:15-17 and the written procedures found in The Directory for Baptist Church's by Edward T. Hiscox, shall be followed to allow for restitution and/or restoration. The Chairman of the Board of Deacons shall conference with the pastor first, then the Joint Board. If an attitude of repentance has not been determined with these two meetings, the incumbent shall be asked to come before the church body for restoration or such other actions as deemed appropriate by the church.

Such action shall take place at a specially called business meeting by the Chairman of the Board of Deacons. At least two week's public notice will be given the church body and the pastor. The specially called business meeting may be by recommendation of a majority of the deacons or by a written petition signed by not less than one-fourth of the active church members. The moderator for this meeting shall be the Chairman of the Board of Deacons. If restoration is not possible, the Church may declare the office of the pastor vacant. The vote to declare the office vacant shall be with an affirmation vote of two-thirds of the members present being necessary to declare the office of pastor vacant.

The church will compensate the pastor in accordance with the contractual agreement except in cases of misconduct. In cases of misconduct, the termination shall be immediate and one month's severance compensation shall be paid. The severance compensation shall be rendered in not more than thirty days.

The Board of Deacons will be responsible for supplying ministers during the absence of the pastor.

**NEW**

**Pastor Elected**

The Pastor elected shall serve until the relationship is terminated by the Pastor's request or the Church's request. The Pastor shall preside at meetings of Bethlehem Baptist Church and serve as moderator in all business meetings in keeping with Robert's Rules of Order.

**The Pastor Search Committee will recommend the compensation package, and will obtain assistance from other committees, as needed. The final negotiated compensation package, via the Joint Ministry recommendation, shall be brought before the body for consideration and approval. In a called business meeting, the negotiated compensation package will be considered and voted on. A three-fourths vote of active members present is required for approval, provided a quorum is met.**

**Resignation/Dismissal from the Office of Pastor**

The Pastor may resign from the Office of Pastor **according to his/her covenant with the Church.**

The Church may dismiss the Pastor of duties when it becomes evident that the Pastor is no longer fulfilling the responsibilities **included** in the **Constitution and Bylaws and/or those in the Pastor's covenant** or for misconduct. The guidelines set forth in Matthew 18:15-17 and the written procedures found in The Directory for Baptist Church's by Edward T. Hiscox, shall be followed to allow for restitution and/or restoration. The **Chair of the Deacon Ministry** shall conference with the Pastor first, **and** then the **Joint Ministry**. If an attitude of repentance has not been determined in these two meetings, the Pastor shall be asked to come before the Church body for restoration or such other actions as deemed appropriate by the Church. Such action shall take place at a specially-called business meeting by the **Chair of the Deacon Ministry**. **At least 15 calendar days'** public notice will be given **to** the church body and the Pastor. The specially-called business meeting may be by recommendation of a majority of the Deacons, **which shall be shared with Joint Ministry**, or by a written petition **signed by not less than one-fourth of the active church members**. The moderator for this meeting shall be the **Chair of the Deacon Ministry or a moderator provided by Baptist Organizations with which Bethlehem is affiliated**. If restoration is not possible, the Church may declare the Office of Pastor vacant. The vote **necessary** to declare the Office of Pastor vacant shall be an **affirmative** vote of two-thirds of **active members** present, **provided a quorum is met.**

The Church will compensate the Pastor in accordance with **his/her covenant**, except in cases of misconduct. In cases of misconduct, the termination shall be immediate and one month's severance compensation shall be paid in not more than thirty days.

**When the Office of the Pastor becomes vacant, the Deacon Ministry shall be responsible for supplying ministers for worship and Christian education. The Deacon Ministry is also responsible for seeking and selection of an Interim Pastor upon first obtaining approval from the congregation.**

**Compensation for an Interim Pastor shall be determined by the Trustee Ministry and agreed upon by the Joint Ministry. The congregation shall be informed of the compensation for Interim Pastor.**

NEW

**ARTICLE III - CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS AND AUXILIARIES**

The church shall maintain and promote services of Bible teaching, church training, and support. All organizations/auxiliaries shall be under church control and reporting regularly to the church at the regular church business meeting. All activities are subject to church coordination and approval. Each auxiliary shall have a statement of reasons for existence and provisions for continued support of II Timothy 2:15.

Officers of all organizations and auxiliaries shall be elected annually in the month of October and the organizations and auxiliaries shall report the result of said elections to the Joint Board. Officers shall be installed at a-service of worship in January.

An individual may hold presidency or directorship in no more than one organization or auxiliary simultaneously.

**ARTICLES II – CHURCH OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES**

**E. Joint Ministry**

The Joint Ministry is comprised of all the Deacons and Trustees, who in conjunction with the Pastor, serve as the leadership team on behalf of the congregation, working in the best interest of the church body. The ministry collaboratively reviews and acts on spiritual, business, and administrative matters of the church. These matters and concerns require the collective consideration of Joint Ministry. Such matters and concerns involve, but are not limited to, the Church’s financial resources, engagement in the community, and otherwise the church’s ongoing ministries.

Any actions or issues that require approval will be voted on by the Joint Ministry. A two-thirds vote of the Deacons and Trustees present is required, provided the quorum is met. The quorum will be 51% of the current total number of active Deacons and Trustees.

**ARTICLE III - CHURCH MINISTRIES AND COMMITTEES**

The church shall maintain and promote opportunities for worship, Bible study, training in church leadership, and ministry engagement. All ministries and committees are under the authority and guidance of the Pastor and Joint Ministry and shall report regularly at church business meetings. All ministry activities are subject to church coordination and approval. Each ministry and standing committees shall have a statement of purpose, and execution plan, and provisions for continued spiritual growth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Leaders of all ministries, i.e., (Chairs, Vice Chairs, Presidents, Vice Presidents, and Secretaries), shall be elected every-two years in the month of October. The results of said elections shall be reported to the Pastor, Deacons, and Trustees, i.e., the Joint Ministry. Church Officers and ministry leaders shall be installed at a worship service in January every two years.

As led by the Holy Spirit new ministries may be initiated and/or existing ministries may be revised or abolished to better serve the Church and community.

An individual may not hold more than one of the leadership offices listed above at a time.