

WESTER HAILES BAPTIST CHURCH



CONSTITUTION and RULES

29th May 2024

CONSTITUTION

THIS CHURCH RECOGNISES THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AS ITS HEAD AND UNDERTAKES TO MANAGE ITS AFFAIRS ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES

1. DOCTRINAL BASIS

This Church adheres to the following statement of doctrine:

- a. The one Sovereign, Triune God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- b. The full inspiration of the Scriptures as originally given and their Divine authority in all matters of faith and conduct.
- c. The sinfulness and guilt of mankind rendering everyone subject to the condemnation of God.
- d. The incarnation of the Son of God, His true humanity and deity, His substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection and ascension, His intercession on our behalf and His visible personal return as King and Judge.
- e. The salvation of sinners by the grace of God through their repentance toward Him and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- f. The necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit in leading the sinner into this repentance and faith.
- g. The indwelling and work of the Holy Spirit in the believer.
- h. The one Church universal to which all true believers belong.

2. ORDINANCES

- a. Baptism
Baptism of believers by immersion may be administered to those professing faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Candidates for baptism must bear evidence of that profession and be approved by the Elders' Court. Exceptions will only be considered where it is claimed that immersion would be injurious to the applicant's health. Baptism will be administered publicly.
- b. The Lord's Supper
The ordinance of the Lord's Supper should be observed at least once in every month. All who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ may attend.

3. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Members of this Church must accept the Constitution and show faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, having publicly confessed this faith by the ordinance of baptism by immersion. Exceptions on the grounds of age, infirmity or any other cause may only be made at the discretion of the Elders' Court. A roll of Church members shall be maintained by the Church Secretary. Additions and deletions, except in the case of resignation or death, must be proposed by the Elders and approved by the members at a Church Business Meeting. Applicants for membership must:

- a. Complete a form of application.
- b. Be interviewed by two Church members, one of whom must be a member of the Elders' Court.
- c. Be recommended to the Church through the Elders' Court. If the application is accepted by the Church, the applicant shall be received into membership.

4. OFFICE-BEARERS

a) Pastoral Team

The Senior Pastor, the Pastor and/or Assistant Pastor and/or Youth Pastor (and other members of the Pastoral Team, if appointed) must be in full accord with the Constitution. Authority to choose any member of the Pastoral Team, or terminate such an appointment shall be vested in the members of the Church.

b) Elders

Elders shall be male Church members of at least twelve months standing and be over twenty-one years of age. They will be appointed in accordance with Rule 2 below.

c) Elders' Court

The Elders' Court is responsible for the oversight of the Church.

The Elders' Court shall consist of the Pastoral Team and the Elders. The Court shall appoint one of the Elders to be Chairman. His role will be to coordinate the work of the Elders Court. The Chairman will normally chair meetings of the Court. The Church Secretary will normally act as secretary to the Court.

d) Diaconate

A Diaconate may be constituted provided at least 4 church members are prepared to serve as deacons. Deacons shall be members of the church of good standing, male or female, chosen by the Elders' Court and approved at the next half-yearly church business meeting following their appointment. The names of proposed deacons will be advised to the church on the four Sundays prior to such a meeting, and objections must be advised in confidence to the Elders Court ahead of the meeting. The Diaconate will be responsible for co-ordinating and overseeing the practical care of the church membership, and of church property. Matters of spiritual concern will be referred to the Pastoral Team or the Elders' Court, to whom the Diaconate shall remain responsible. Financial matters will be dealt with in accordance with Clause 7 of the Constitution and the church's financial policy, as approved by members.

e) Others

Authority to choose other Office Bearers to assist the Pastoral Team or to terminate their appointment, shall be vested in the members of the Church. Recommendation shall be made to the Church by the Elders' Court.

5. CHURCH BUSINESS MEETINGS

The business of the Church shall be considered by members, to whom it shall be confidential, at Church Business Meetings which shall be held at least every six months, including the regular Annual General Meeting.

Special Business Meetings shall be convened when deemed necessary by the Elders' Court.

6. ORGANISATIONS AND COMMITTEES

All organisations and committees within the Church are responsible to the Church through the Elders' Court. People involved in children's and young people's work, and leaders of all other organisations within the Church shall preferably be Church members and shall be approved in office by the Elders.

Where a childrens' / young peoples' worker or leader of a Church organisation is not a member they must fully accept the discipline and authority of the Church leadership.

A Pastor shall be ex-officio President of all organisations within the Church.

7. FINANCE AND BORROWING

Approval of a Church Business Meeting is required before raising bank finance for any project. Where overdraft facilities are required for regular expenditure due to unforeseen circumstances or short-term needs, these shall be arranged at an appropriate level at the discretion of the Treasurer, confirmed by the Elders' Court

8. ALTERATION OF CONSTITUTION

No alteration shall be made to this Constitution except by a vote of three quarters of the members present at a specially convened Church Business Meeting. Such an alteration then becomes binding on the whole Church.

RULES

Rule 1 PASTORAL VACANCY

- a. When a vacancy in the Senior Pastorate arises, a Church Business Meeting shall be called to elect a Vacancy Committee which shall comprise up to four Elders (as chosen by them) and four other Church members (male or female) of good standing. If more than four church members are nominated, those receiving most votes in a ballot of church members shall be appointed. During a vacancy the Elders shall be responsible for arranging pulpit supply.
- b. The Vacancy Committee, shall appoint a Church Member of high standing or other suitable person who is in full accord with the Constitution to act as Moderator.
- c. Following approval by the Church, the Moderator will normally act as chairman of the Vacancy Committee.
- d. The Vacancy Committee shall be responsible for bringing prospective candidates before the Church, assessing their acceptability and bringing a recommendation of a sole nominee to a specially convened Church Business Meeting.
- e. A call will be sent to a sole nominee if he receives at least four-fifths of the votes cast at a specially convened Church Business Meeting. A postal ballot will be held in cases of unavoidable absence.
- f. In the case of a vacancy in the Pastoral Team (other than the Senior Pastor), the Elders will bring a recommendation of a sole nominee to a specially convened Church Business Meeting. The voting rules in (e) above will apply.

Rule 2

ELECTION OF ELDERS

- a. Elders shall be male members of the church of good standing, chosen by the Elders' Court on the basis of scripture, willing to serve as elders and approved at the next half-yearly church business meeting following their proposed appointment. The names of proposed new elders will be advised to the church on the four Sundays prior to such a meeting, and objections must be advised in confidence to the Senior Pastor or Elders Court ahead of the meeting.
- b. Elders shall continue to serve in that office until they resign or retire from the post, or are removed by the Elders' Court.
- c. The Elders shall elect a Chairman from among their number. Elders shall elect the Church Secretary and Treasurer from among their number or propose another Church member for either office to a Church Business Meeting. In the latter case the appointment shall be approved if two-thirds of the members present at the meeting are in favour.
- d. (i) The Elders are empowered to recommended to a Church Business Meeting that elders who have served on the Court but retired will be able to assist the elders in the discharge of some of the duties of the Elders' Court as detailed below in section (ii)

(ii) Duties of honorary elders: membership interviews and other tasks as requested by the eldership. Such honorary positions will not however entitle the elder to attend the Elder's Court unless invited.

(iii) Each appointment shall be approved if a ballot shows that two-thirds of the members present at the meeting are in favour.

Rule 3 MEMBERS' OBLIGATIONS

Members are under obligation to:

- a. Join regularly in public worship on the Lord's Day.
- b. Participate in fellowship at the Lord's Supper.
- c. Maintain the spirit of Christian love and seek with God's help to demonstrate this in daily living.
- d. Engage in Christian service.
- e. Contribute towards the work of the Lord as He enables them.
- f. Join in fellowship in the Church's regular midweek meetings, and participate in the business meetings of the Church unless for good reason unable to do so. (At least every family should be represented at these meetings if at all possible.)

Members disregarding their membership obligations shall if possible be visited by a Pastor and an Elder with a view to full restoration in a spirit of Christian love in accordance with Scripture. Members who persistently fail to meet their membership obligations following such visits shall have their right to vote on Church business suspended by the Elders. Members who later return to active fulfilment of their obligations will have their full membership rights restored by the Elders.

Rule 4 CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Members giving private or public offence who persist in sin after receiving due warning, following visits by the Pastor or Elders, may be disciplined by the Elders' Court. The Elders will inform the member that he has

- a. lost his or her voting rights, and/or
- b. been excluded from the Lord's Supper, and/or
- c. been excluded from service in the Church.

Members will be restored to full membership upon expressing their repentance to God, and after satisfying the Elders' Court as to the genuine nature of their repentance.

In cases where such restoration cannot be achieved, the Elders shall bring a recommendation to a Church meeting that his/her name be deleted from the membership roll. Reasons for such recommendations may be kept confidential at the discretion of the Elders' Court.

Rule 5 BUSINESS MEETINGS

- a. Notice of Church Business Meetings shall normally be given on two consecutive Sundays immediately prior to the meeting.
- b. The Chairman of the Elders Court shall normally preside at Business Meetings of the Church. In his absence the Church Secretary shall be responsible for the conduct of the meeting and the appointment of a chairman.
- c. Motions must be submitted in writing to the Church Secretary at least seven days before the meeting. In matters of urgency, where notice has not been given, the chairman shall decide whether such business is competent.
- d. Voting shall be by a show of hands, except in the case of the call of a Pastor or unless a ballot has been requested by the meeting. The chairman shall have one vote, equal with other members.
- e. Decisions approved by two-thirds of the members present at a Church Business Meeting shall be binding on all members whether present or absent.
- f. The Senior Pastor or a majority of the Elders' Court may call a special Church Business Meeting at any time. Members may also call a special Church Business Meeting to consider any subject relevant to the welfare of the Church by submitting a request in writing to the Pastor or Church Secretary. Such requests must state the subject for consideration and be signed by a minimum of ten members. Only the subject so requested shall be discussed.
- g. The Annual General Meeting shall be held, normally on the second Thursday in May.
 - (i) It shall receive reports from the Pastor and the Church Secretary and the annual accounts from the Church Treasurer. The accounts will be audited and submitted for approval by the members.
 - (ii) Each Church organisation, committee, and organisers of other Church ministries shall submit a written annual report to the Church Secretary at least three weeks before the Annual General Meeting. All reports will be available to members prior to the meeting.
- h. The following appointments shall be submitted to the Church for majority approval at the Annual General Meeting:
 - (i) Sunday School Superintendent and leader of each department.

- (ii) The leaders of all other organisations.
- (iii) Organisers of other Church ministries.

Rule 6 COMMITTEES AND ORGANISATIONS

- a. The rules, and any amendment thereto, relating to the conduct and administration of the organisations of the Church must be approved by the Elders' Court.
- b. No meeting of any organisation or committee which involves Church members should take place at the same time as a meeting involving the Church in general.
- c. The leader of each organisation and committee is responsible for ensuring that the Church premises are left clean and tidy and, where appropriate, properly locked up after use. They must also ensure that any further Conditions of Use in relation to the premises as laid down by the Diaconate are complied with.
- d. In terms of Section 6 of the Constitution, a "leader" will be taken to mean the person in charge of the organisation. See Rule 5h.
- e. Each organisation, committee and ministry shall have stated aims which shall be approved by the Elders' Court.
- f. The leader or secretary of each committee or organisation shall as soon as possible advise the Church Secretary of the dates and times of all proposed meetings, whether of a regular nature or otherwise, so that conflicts between meetings of different organisations can be avoided.
- g. Individuals or organisations, other than Church organisations, must apply in writing to the Church Secretary for permission to use the premises. Such organisations must comply with Conditions of Use as laid down by the Diaconate.

Rule 7 VOTING PROCEDURE

- a. Except where otherwise stated in these Rules decisions approved by two-thirds of the members casting their vote at a Business Meeting or via a ballot of members shall be binding on all members whether present or absent. Abstentions shall not be included in the total of votes cast in determining whether the necessary majority has been achieved.
- b. A quorum at a Church Business Meeting shall consist of one-third of the number of members entitled to vote. This number shall also apply to any ballot. Abstentions shall be included in determining whether a quorum has been achieved.

- c. Members entitled to vote shall include all members aged 18 or over other than
 - (i) those who have voluntarily foregone their right to vote (for example, due to temporary absence from the Church due to work, study or Christian service)
 - (ii) those who have had their right to vote suspended by the Elders' Court for disciplinary reasons or because of prolonged absence from the Church.

Rule 8 ALTERATION OF RULES

No alteration shall be made to the Rules of the Church except by a vote of two-thirds of the members voting at a Church Business Meeting. Such alteration then becomes binding on the whole Church.

Policy Statements

In order to assist members a number of papers on various aspects of church life have been prepared by the Pastor and Elders over the years. These are available from the Church Secretary on request. Papers currently available are:

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| • Doctrinal Statement on the Gifts of the Spirit | G03 |
| • Code of Practice for the Exercise of the Gifts | G04 |
| • Guidelines for Marriage | G05 |
| • Guidelines for Infant Dedication Service | G06 |
| • Those considering the call to full-time service | G01 |
| • Fund-raising | G07 |
| • Financial Guidelines | G08 |