

Black Forest Christian Fellowship

**CONSTITUTION OF
BLACK FOREST CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP**

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PREAMBLE

As a local representation of the worldwide body of Christ, the Black Forest Christian Fellowship (BFCF) exists to magnify God's glory in this region, this continent and this world by carrying out the divinely ordained ministries of the Church.

Worship: *celebrating His glory*

Glorifying God by ministering to Him through offering praise and adoration, celebration, thanksgiving, confession, obedience, and service in biblically prescribed acts and in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's table, and by teaching a worship-directed perspective to all of life and ministry; thereby giving recognition, honor, and glory to the triune God.

Establishing believers in Christian faith and practice: *expounding His glory*

Glorifying God by ministering to individuals through preaching and teaching the Word of God, grounding in biblical doctrine, guiding in holy living, and equipping for fruitful service; thereby contributing to the process of growth in grace and truth as God works to conform each believer to the image of Christ.

Fellowship: *reflecting His glory*

Glorifying God by ministering to the body of Christ through encouraging one another, stimulating one another to love and good deeds, cultivating caring relationships characterized by humility and service, and exhorting and disciplining for the purpose of restoration; thereby building the body of Christ in faith, hope, love, purity and unity in and through the Holy Spirit.

Outreach: *proclaiming His glory*

Glorifying God by ministering to the world through proclaiming the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, lovingly and effectively witnessing in word and deed as a body and as individuals; thereby making known the way of reconciliation with God and making disciples of Jesus Christ in our community and throughout the world.

This Constitution is intended to serve the above purposes by providing an organizational framework for the ministry of this church in its particular context.

ARTICLE 1: IDENTITY

Black Forest Christian Fellowship

The name of this church is *Black Forest Christian Fellowship*. It is an evangelical, English-language, international, nondenominational, self-governing and elder-led local congregation of Christian believers.

ARTICLE 2: BELIEFS

This church is committed to preserving, promoting, and defending God's Rev. of biblical truth as recorded in the inspired writing of the Old and New Testaments and as understood in historic Christian orthodoxy.

The commitment is entrusted to the Elders of this church, who are mandated to embrace and defend this body of truth, as reflected in the *Articles of Faith* and in the *Distinctive Beliefs* of this church. Therefore all Elders shall agree wholeheartedly, without reservation, with both of these documents.

All Deacons, teachers, other church ministry leaders and guest speakers shall agree wholeheartedly, without reservation, with the *Articles of Faith* and agree not to teach contrary to or knowingly contradict the *Distinctive Beliefs*.

All BFCF Partners shall agree wholeheartedly, without reservation, with the *Articles of Faith*.

A. Articles of Faith

The Articles of Faith is a statement of essential biblical truths that this church considers necessary for the effective functioning of and Partnership in this local congregation.

Scripture: The Bible in its entirety is alone the inspired written Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16).

God: God, perfect in His love, holiness and glory, is the Creator of all things (Gen. 1 & 2; Rev. 4:11). He exists eternally in three Persons-- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19; Lk. 3:21-22; 2 Cor. 13:14).

Jesus Christ: Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully human (Heb. 1:3; Lk. 1:30-35; Jn. 1:1,14).

Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit is a Person and is fully God (Acts 5:3-4). He indwells and is at work in all believers (Rom. 8:1-16; 1 Cor. 3:16).

Mankind: Created by God in His image, mankind has fallen into sin and become sinners separated from God, under the penalty of death, and unable to save themselves (Gen. 1:26; Rom. 3:23; Eph. 2:1-5).

The Death and Resurrection of Christ: Jesus Christ demonstrated God's perfect love and satisfied His justice by dying on the cross and shedding His blood to pay the penalty for sin; He was raised bodily from the dead on the third day (Heb. 9:11-15; 1 Jn. 4:9-10; 1 Cor. 15:3-4).

Salvation: Sinful man is spiritually dead and needs to be born again (Jn. 3:3-8). Salvation, which provides the forgiveness of sin, is a free gift of God's grace, available to all who repent and place their personal trust in Christ and His work on the cross (Eph. 2:8-9). To those who believe on His name, Jesus guarantees the eternal blessedness of a place in the Father's home in heaven (Jn. 1:12; 3:16; 5:24-25; 14:2, 19).

Return of Christ: Christ will one day return to earth in glory (Acts 1:11; 2 Thess. 1:10).

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B. Distinctive Beliefs

It is our conviction that genuine biblical unity must be founded in truth (Eph. 4:1-6, 14-15) and that purity of doctrine always be expressed with love for one another (1 Cor. 13). It is our conviction that in order to facilitate the unity and healthy functioning of a local church, and in order to avoid lengthy debates about these matters, it is important to clarify the distinctive beliefs that this church is committed to preserve and promote.

The *Distinctive Beliefs* is designed to be a pastoral tool to assist the Elders in their leadership and to clarify for the congregation the particular identity of this local church.

The Scriptures

We affirm that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are in their entirety the verbally inspired Word of God, inerrant in the original manuscripts, and the infallible authority for Christian faith and practice (2 Tim. 3: 16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).

The Godhead

We affirm that God exists eternally in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and that these are nonetheless one in essence, sharing the same perfections and attributes (Mt. 28:18-19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

God the Father

We affirm that God the Father is the Creator of all things (Gen. 1 & 2; Rev. 4:11), the sovereign Ruler of the universe (Isa. 40:13-17; Eph. 1:11), and the author of the eternal plan for the salvation of mankind (Eph. 3:11). He is the Father of the Son of God, Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:16), and of those who place their faith in Christ (Gal. 3:26).

Jesus Christ

We affirm the Son is fully God, possessing all of the attributes of deity (Col. 1:15-19), and being eternally co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit in glory and majesty.

We affirm that God the Son became fully human as well in Jesus of Nazareth, having been born of the virgin Mary (Lk. 1:30-35; Jn. 1:14; Gal. 4:4). We affirm that in the incarnation Jesus Christ in no way ceased to be God.

We affirm that Jesus Christ was born without sin, lived a completely sinless life on earth (Heb. 4:15), died on the cross for sin (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24), and rose bodily from the dead on the third day (Lk. 24; 1 Cor. 15:4-20). He ascended into heaven, from where He reigns until His return (Acts 1:9-11; 7:55).

The Holy Spirit

We affirm that the Holy Spirit is fully God (Mt. 28:19; Jn. 14:16-17; Acts 5:3-4)

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We affirm that the Holy Spirit inspired the human authors of Scripture to deliver God's revelation to man (2 Pet. 1:21; Jn. 16:13) in written form, and that this ministry ceased with the end of the apostolic era and the completion of the New Testament writings.

We affirm that the Holy Spirit's ministry is to glorify Christ (Jn. 16:14) by convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jn. 16:8-11), by regenerating and subsequently indwelling those who trust in Jesus Christ for salvation (Jn. 3:3-6; Titus 3:5; 1 Jn. 4:13; 1 Cor. 6:19; Gal 4:6), by baptizing believers into the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13), by enabling believers to have victory over sin (Rom. 8:2-4) and to build up the church (1 Cor. 12:12-27), and by illumining the minds of believers in order that they might understand spiritual truth (1 Cor. 2:12-15).

We affirm that every believer has full access to the sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit from the moment of salvation (Rom. 8:9-16). This ministry involves the empowering of the believer for the life of growing godliness and good works (Rom. 8:1-17; Gal 5:22-23) in obedience to the Scriptures.

Mankind

We affirm that mankind was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27; James 3:9).

We affirm that Adam sinned by disobeying God's command in the garden of Eden, thereby bringing all mankind under condemnation and the sentence of death (Rom. 5:12-14). Because of Adam's sin, all people are born sinners by nature (Rom. 5:19), are alienated from God, and can do nothing to save themselves from His just judgment (Rom. 1:18-23; Eph. 2:1-5).

We affirm the bodily resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved to the resurrection of life and those that are lost to the resurrection of condemnation and judgment (Jn. 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; 1 Cor. 15:12-49; Rev. 20:12-13).

Salvation

We affirm that Jesus Christ died on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice for sin (Isa. 53:4-12; Mk. 10:45; Rom. 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:24). On the merits of this payment for sin, all who repent and trust personally in Jesus Christ as Savior are justified and declared righteous in God's sight (Rom. 3:21-22, 26-28; 2 Cor. 7:10; 2 Pet. 3:9), forgiven of all their sins (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), adopted as sons into God's family (Eph. 1:5; Gal 3:26), and given eternal life (Jn. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:3-5).

We affirm that because of his fallen nature, man is totally unable to save himself (Rom. 3:23; Eph. 2:1-5); redemption has been accomplished solely by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross and shedding of His blood (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 Jn. 1:7). Salvation is bestowed as a free gift of God's sovereign grace, totally apart from any personal merit, on the basis of faith alone (Rom. 3:24; 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5,7).

We affirm that every child of God may enjoy the assurance of personal salvation (1 Jn. 5:10-13). We affirm as well God's gracious perseverance with those whom He has brought to salvation so that the good work of grace thus begun within them will ultimately be brought to completion (Jn. 5:24; 6:35-44; 10:27-29; 1 Cor. 1:8; Phil. 1:6; 2 Thess 3:3).

The Church

We affirm that Christ's supreme purpose in this age of grace is to build His church, the Body of Christ (Mt. 16:18; Eph. 4:1-16; 5:25, 27) and thus glorify Himself.

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We affirm that at the moment of salvation every believer is baptized by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12: 12-13; Col. 1:24) and receives in Christ all that is needed for godly living (2 Pet 1:3).

We affirm that the local church is a divinely-instituted manifestation of the universal Body of Christ, and that it exists for the purposes of assembling together for worship, instruction in the Word of God, prayer, and mutual edification; practicing the ordinances of water baptism and the Lord's Supper; and evangelizing its neighbors and all the world (Heb. 10:24-25; Acts 2:41-42; Mt. 28: 18-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-28).

We affirm that the local church is to be constantly striving towards unity in truth and in love; the goal of unity should be served by the teaching, care ministries, fellowship, and discipline within the body (Eph. 4:1-16; Phil. 2:1,2; Col. 3:12-16).

We affirm that the New Testament pattern for the local church includes godly leadership taken from that congregation: a plurality of Elders, to whom is entrusted the doctrinal and shepherding oversight of the body (Acts 20:28; Titus 1:9; 1 Pet. 5:1-3); and a plurality of Deacons, to whom various functions of compassionate service are delegated (Acts 6:1-6; Phil. 1:1).

Satan

We affirm that Satan or, as he also is called in the New Testament, the Devil (Mt. 16:23; 1 Pet. 5:8) is a created and fallen angel (Lk. 10:18; Rev. 20:2), who as ruler of this world (Jn. 14:30), leads all evil against God and Mankind and all that is good and holy. Having been created, Satan has great but limited power and was defeated completely at the cross, where Christ finally and publicly triumphed over him (Mt. 4:1; Lk. 22:31; Jn. 16:11; 17:15; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2-6; 6:11-12).

We affirm that there is coming a time, at the last day, when Satan's final defeat will take place, and his ultimate condemnation and punishment will be sealed forever in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10).

Angels

We affirm that there is a special order of created beings, called angels, who belong to the heavenly court, surrounding the Holy Throne of God and serving Him as servants, messengers, ministering spirits, and agents of worship (Ps. 103:20; Isa. 6:1-3; Mt. 4:11; 28:2; Lk. 1:26-37; Heb. 1:14; Rev. 5:11).

We affirm that when Satan fell, he took a host of these fallen angels with him, who are called in the Bible, evil spirits or demons (Mk. 5:2; Lk. 7:21; Jas. 2:19) and serve him by entering people, controlling affairs and warring against God and His Church (Mk. 5:1-20; 1 Cor. 10:20). However, as in the case of their master, Satan, Christ has obtained victory on the cross over of all ungodly powers of this world and no evil spirit can stand against Jesus' name but will join the Devil in the eternal fire that awaits them (Mt. 25:41; Eph. 6:10-18).

- **Last Things**

We affirm that the Lord Jesus Christ will one day return bodily to the earth in great glory to establish His reign over creation (Acts 1:11; 2 Thess. 1:10).

We affirm that every believer will spend eternity in heaven in the presence of God, and that rewards will be given or withheld on the basis of the believer's service to Christ while on earth

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(1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). We affirm that unbelievers will spend eternity in hell, separated from God in conscious torment (Rev. 20:10-15).

ARTICLE 3: BFCF PARTNERSHIP

A. Purpose

The purpose of *BFCF Partnership* (see Paul's affirmation, in Phil. 1:3-5, of the Philippian Christians' *partnership in the gospel* with him) is to identify publicly those persons who commit themselves to participation in the life of this local church (as described below) and who are the primary beneficiaries of this church's ministry.

The leadership of the church will regularly provide information about BFCF Partnership to those persons who participate in church activities, encouraging them to consider their own participation as Partners.

B. Basis

It is God, through His Spirit, who confers membership in the universal body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13). It is the responsibility of the Elders to ensure that those persons who become BFCF Partners are indeed members of Christ's universal body. BFCF Partners of this church shall:

1. Acknowledge Jesus Christ as personal Savior;
2. Evidence personal salvation by a willingness to grow in maturity and in submission to His Lordship; and
3. Agree wholeheartedly, without reservation, with the "Articles of Faith."

Membership in another local church in a different geographical area shall not be a hindrance to BFCF Partnership.

C. Privileges

1. Pastoral care and prayer support .
2. Help with special material needs.
3. A voice in the functioning of the church and full participation in congregational meetings.
4. Eligibility to be nominated to serve as Deacons all Partners); eligibility to be nominated to serve as Elders (all male Partners).
5. Regular communication from the church leadership, including:
 - a. minutes of congregational meetings
 - b. printed reports of actions taken by both groups
 - c. financial reports
6. Accountability and church discipline with the goal of restoration.

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D. Responsibilities

Each BFCF Partner agrees to participate in and contribute to the life, fellowship and ministry of this church by:

1. Purposing to help this church carry out its God-ordained responsibilities.
2. Exercising his or her gifts, skills, and talents in order to build up the body.
3. Guarding the unity of the body through the exercise of humility, gentleness, patience, and love in all relationships.
4. Communicating with those in leadership positions concerning personal insights, needs, and concerns.
5. Giving regularly and generously, as God enables, toward the financial needs of the church;
6. Promoting the reputation of this church, verbally and through a lifestyle of godliness and obedience.
7. Encouraging, esteeming, and submitting to the leaders God has placed in authority over the church body. and
8. Supporting the church by taking part in the selection and confirmation of Elders and Deacons, by participating in Congregational Meetings, and by upholding its ministries and its people in prayer.

E. Procedure

1. Interest in BFCF Partnership should be communicated to an Elder. Partnership will be open to Junior and Senior High School students, with parental permission.
2. The prospective Partner will be interviewed to determine if the person should be confirmed as a Partner, in accordance with the *Purpose, Basis, and Privileges and Responsibilities* of BFCF Partnership.
3. Those persons who affirm their Partnership with BFCF, and who have been confirmed as Partners by the Elders, will be recognized publicly through means determined by the Elders.

F. Discipline

BFCF Partners are subject to the ministry of church discipline. The purpose of discipline within a local church body is to restore an erring brother or sister to a proper relationship to Christ and to fellowship with that body of believers. Discipline is administered by the Elders in accordance with scriptural principles and teaching, in a spirit of love and gentleness, and with a high degree of confidentiality.

G. Termination

Except in unusual circumstances, Partnership in this church will automatically terminate once the Partner permanently moves away from the area. Partnership may also be terminated upon written request of the Partner.

The Elders shall review the Partnership list annually and may remove from Partnership persons who have not attended regular worship services of the church for at least one year. The Elders may also remove a person from Partnership as a result of church discipline.

ARTICLE 4: CHURCH GOVERNMENT, ORGANIZATION, AND PRACTICES

A. Authority and Leadership

The ultimate authority of this church is Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the Church. His leadership is mediated by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, the Bible. At the same time,

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God has established the principle of delegated authority in various realms, including the Church. The pattern of leadership which Jesus established is servant leadership. Leaders serve under God's authority and for the good of those they lead. This means that their service is first and foremost designed to please God and not man, for it is God to whom they will give account. At the same time they must avoid the "lording it over" attitude about which Jesus warned. Followers in the church are to be careful to honor, support and pray for their spiritual leaders. See 1 Cor. 4:1-5; Mk. 10:42-45; 1 Tim 5:17 and Heb. 13:17.

B. ELDERS

1. Authority

The governing authority of this church rests in a group of biblically qualified men called Elders. The Elders are chosen from among the Partners of this church body, are affirmed by them, and serve in submission to Christ and the Word. Corporately, this group of men is charged by God with the oversight and spiritual care of this church and the people in it (Acts 20:28).

The Elders shall have the authority to implement and enforce this Constitution. In addition, the Elders may create other written documents to govern areas of the ministry and operations of this church not directly addressed by this Constitution.

Final authority for all decisions affecting the affairs of this church is reserved for the Elders. Final responsibility for all decisions made by the Elders or their representatives rests with the Elders corporately.

2. Accountability

In their service to the congregation, the Elders are accountable to God and to one another. The Elders shall provide an accounting of church affairs through congregational meetings which will take place at least three times a year. At such times, they also shall provide written summaries of actions by the Elders and issues under consideration, as well as current financial reports.

3. Responsibilities

The Elders are collectively responsible to shepherd the flock and to lead the church in the fulfillment of their God-given calling. Elders provide leadership through teaching and worship, provide pastoral care, stimulate prayer and outreach, administer discipline and resolve disputes, stimulate vision and encourage believers to serve in areas of giftedness. They provide overall leadership and oversight of all programs and activities of the church. They are also responsible to assure that the *Articles of Faith* and the *Distinctive Beliefs* are adhered to.

The Elders may delegate functional responsibility for areas under their general oversight, except for those responsibilities properly reserved to the Elders either by biblical instruction or by this Constitution. Areas of general oversight include:

- a. Administrative: matters bearing on budget, finances, and salaries; facilities; church staff and personnel; and established and ongoing church ministries, programs, and committees.
- b. Pastoral: matters bearing on the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of the congregation; the direction of the overall church ministry; the provision of opportunities for service; the encouragement of church Partners to exercise their gifts and abilities for the good of the body.
- c. Doctrinal: matters bearing on the *Beliefs* (Article 2) of this church, the doctrinal content of church ministries and programs, and the correction of false doctrine.

4. Organization

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The Elders who give leadership to the church are those who have been confirmed in accordance with this Constitution, and whose term of service is current.

The number of Elders shall be determined by the Elders based on the needs and the size of the church and the availability of qualified men; and the Elders will also take into account the national, cultural and vocational elements represented in the congregation in the selection process. The minimum number of Elders shall be five. So long as the number of Elders meets or exceeds the minimum, no more than 40% of board members shall be Ministerial Staff. If the Elders are not able to maintain these minimum numbers, they shall continue to operate with full governing authority to discharge their ministry responsibilities, while actively seeking to increase membership to the minimum size.

The Elders shall establish the means by which they choose a Chairman from among them. The Chairman of the Elders shall moderate meetings and represent the Elders to the congregation and to the Ministerial Staff.

5. Procedures

The Elders may establish standard policies and procedures by which they will function as a board.

All decisions and actions by the Elders shall be on the basis of the principle of consensus. The Elders may establish standards for expressing the principle of consensus in its decisions and actions.

C. Deacons

1. Authority

Deacons shall be established by the Elders, who delegate to them authority to carry out their responsibilities.

2. Accountability

In their service to the congregation, the Deacons are accountable to God, to the Elders, and to one another among the Deacons.

The Deacons shall provide an accounting of their activities through regular reports to the Elders and through reports at congregational meetings.

3. Responsibilities

The Deacons are collectively responsible to assist the Elders in the leadership of the church by fulfilling specific responsibilities delegated to them by the Elders. Such responsibilities may include the compassionate care of people in personal need; church financial affairs; benevolence and missionary needs; care of church facilities; administrative, logistical and practical support of church programs and activities; etc.

4. Organization

The Deacons who serve the church are those who have been confirmed in accordance with this Constitution, and whose term of service with the Deacons is current.

The maximum number of Deacons shall be determined by the Elders based on the needs of the church and the availability of qualified candidates. The minimum number of Deacons shall

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be three. When there are less than three Deacons, the Elders will direct the ministries of the Deacons until the required number of Deacons is met.

The Elders shall select the Chairman of the Deacons. The Chairman of the Deacons shall moderate deacons' meetings and represent the Deacons to the Elders and to the congregation.

5. Policies and Procedures

The Deacons may establish standard policies and procedures by which they function as a group. The Elders will have final authority to approve or disapprove these policies and procedures.

D. Congregational Involvement

The Scriptures are clear that every believer has a unique and necessary role to play in the life of the local church (1 Cor. 12:12-26). Each one is to be actively involved in the life of a local church and to use his or her gifts and talents for the good of the body as a whole. BFCF Partners especially will have multiple opportunities to be involved in the life and service of this church.

Opportunities for involvement in BFCF include:

1. Congregational Meetings

A Congregational Meeting shall be held three times a year on dates and at times designated by the Elders and announced to the congregation at least three weeks in advance. The agenda and structure for each meeting shall be determined by the Elders.

Attendance at a Congregational Meeting shall be open to any interested individual; BFCF Partners will especially be encouraged to attend and participate.

2. Participation in Selection of Church Leadership

This Constitution provides for a significant involvement of BFCF Partners in the process of selecting Elders and Deacons (see Article 5)

3. Communication with the Leadership

It is vital for the health of the church that a relationship of trust, openness, and responsiveness exists between the leadership and the Partnership at large. Oral communication with individual Elders, as well as written communication with the Elders as a whole, is encouraged.

Such communication should always take place in an atmosphere of mutual esteem and with a view to promoting unity in the body, both on the part of those communicating and on the part of the Elders as they consider and respond to the issues raised.

4. Ministry Teams and Committees

Committees, task forces and ministry teams may be established by the Elders or their delegate for the purpose of planning and carrying out ministries and other church activities. Participation in these groups is open to men and women who are Partners of this church.

5. Other Areas

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Each BFCF Partner will be responsible before God for a level of involvement in this church (as outlined in the section on “Privileges and Responsibilities” in Article 3) in keeping with the individual’s gifts, abilities, financial resources, time, and other ministries.

E. Vision, Values and Philosophy of Ministry

A written statement of the vision, values and philosophy of ministry of Black Forest Christian Fellowship may exist as separate documents, subject to ongoing change and revision by the leadership, ministerial staff, and church ministry committees.

The purpose of the Vision, Values and Philosophy of Ministry is to suggest specific strategies for the accomplishment, in this particular historical, cultural and local church context, of the responsibilities of the local church as outlined in the Preamble of this Constitution.

F. Worship Practices

We recognize and respect the variety of expressions of church practice within historic orthodoxy, especially as it relates to baptism, infant dedication, the Lord’s Supper, the use of certain spiritual gifts in public worship and related matters. It is our conviction, however, that it is useful to clarify some of this church’s distinctive practices in these matters as well.

Baptism

Water baptism is a practice commanded by Jesus Christ and is a symbol of God’s redemptive work; it is not understood as something that in itself confers grace. Baptism shall be available to all believers, after consultation with the Elders. The normal practice of this church shall be to baptize by immersion. (Acts 2:37-41; 8:12; 10:48)

Infant and Parent Dedication

We do not baptize infants. We do encourage parents to publicly dedicate themselves and their infants to the Lord as an expression of their dependence on God to rightly nurture their children. (1 Sam. 1; Eph. 6:4)

The Lord’s Supper

The Lord Jesus commanded His disciples to observe a corporate remembrance and proclamation of His death. In participating in the Lord’s Supper believers identify with the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice for them. The elements of the bread and the cup are vivid reminders of the pierced body and shed blood of the Lamb of God for sin; as such they are important symbols of Christ’s work, but do not in themselves confer grace. (Mt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 10:14-17; 11:17-34)

Spiritual Gifts and Public Worship

We believe that the Holy Spirit sovereignly bestows spiritual gifts on each member of the Body of Christ in accordance with 1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12, and Eph. 4. These gifts are not intended to be divisive but rather to edify and equip the saints for the work of ministry. We believe that every believer receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit and is indwelt by the Spirit at the time of salvation (1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 8:9). Furthermore, each believer has at that time received all that is needed for a life of godliness (2 Pet 1:3). Believers have different gifts and no one spiritual gift is possessed by all (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:4-11). We do not believe that the gift of tongues is a necessary evidence of having received the Holy Spirit; and we affirm that the fruit of the Spirit, not the gifts of the Spirit, is a measure of spiritual maturity. We request, therefore, that no one in this church bring pressure to bear upon others by urging any special gift upon them or by teaching that any particular gift is a necessary evidence of spirituality. We recognize the potentially divisive nature of the public use of certain “sign gifts” (such as tongues, prophecy and healing), and it is our desire to avoid creating unnecessary tension and controversy. While we acknowledge the benefit that some believers may experience from the use of such gifts in their own devotional life, we respectfully request that they refrain from their exercise in the public worship services of this church. The

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motivating spirit undergirding all of this is the unity of the faith and building up of the body in love (Eph. 4:13,16).

ARTICLE 5: LEADERSHIP

In order for the church to function effectively, wise, gifted and godly leaders are needed. We believe that the quality of a leader's ministry flows primarily out of the quality of his or her life and character. The guiding principle for leadership in the church is *servant leadership*.

A. ELDERS

1. Qualifications

The qualifications of an Elder are described in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. A biblically qualified Elder must be a man who is characterized by a shepherd's heart, personal integrity, spiritual maturity, the ability to teach, exhort, and correct, stability of family life, a good reputation inside and outside the church and a desire to serve the body.

Also to be taken into account (though secondary to the biblical, spiritual qualifications) will be the national, cultural and vocational diversity reflected in the congregation.

An Elder shall agree wholeheartedly, without reservation, with both the *Articles of Faith* and the *Distinctive Beliefs*.

An Elder shall be a BFCF Partner in accordance with this Constitution.

2. Responsibilities

The collective responsibilities of the Elders are set forth in Article 4B3. Individual Elders will fulfill their responsibilities in accordance with their unique gifting and personality. In any case, each Elder will be involved in personal ministry among the Partners reflecting the biblical functions of an Elder as an overseer and shepherd. These functions include:

- a. Guiding in spiritual and physical affairs of the church (1 Tim. 3:4-5, 5:17).
- b. Teaching the Word (1 Tim. 5:17, Eph. 4:11, Acts 6:4).
- c. Correcting false doctrine (Titus 1:9).
- d. Equipping Partners for ministry (Eph. 4:11-12).
- e. Shepherding the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-4).
- f. Counseling and disciplining Partners in accordance with God's Word (1 Thess. 5:14, 1 Cor. 5:1-13).
- g. Participating in the appointment of Partners to accomplish the ministries of the church (1 Tim. 3:8-13).
- h. Praying for the Partners of the body (Acts 6:4).

Additionally, each Elder shall embrace and defend biblical truth as reflected in the Distinctive Beliefs of this church and shall faithfully attend and actively participate in the meetings of the Elders.

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3. Selection

- a. When a new Elder is to be selected, a list shall be published of all the male BFCF Partners, accompanied by a written explanation of the *Responsibilities* and *Qualifications* of an Elder (see Article 4B3 and 5A1,2). Those men whose terms as Elders will be current for at least one more year, or who are on sabbatical leave, will be so indicated on the list.
- b. The Elders will announce the number of new Elders needed (see Article 4B4). BFCF Partners will be asked to recommend to the Elders those men among the BFCF Partners whom they think a) meet the biblical qualifications and b) would best carry out the Elder responsibilities for the BFCF.
Prospective Elders are normally recognized by Partners as men in the church who are already actively serving in elder-like ways, to the edification of the body.
Under normal circumstances prospective Elders will have been actively involved in the life of BFCF for at least one year and can anticipate being able to serve as Elders for a minimum of two years.
- c. The Elders will examine the recommended men (and any other men whom they may deem qualified) according to the biblical standards for Elders and according to the Elder responsibilities currently needed in the BFCF. The Elders will then compile a list of Elder nominees. Each nominee will be approached by an Elder to ascertain if the nominee is 1) willing to serve, 2) is in agreement with the Distinctive Beliefs of the BFCF, and 3) fully understands the responsibilities of an Elder in the BFCF. The Elders will then present a list of nominees they propose to the BFCF Partners.
- d. BFCF Partners will be asked to affirm each Elder nominee or to indicate specific reservations. Those Partners expressing reservations will be contacted by an Elder to discuss their concerns, which will then be considered by the Elders prior to final appointment.
- e. The nominees appointed as new Elders by the current Elders then will be confirmed as Elders before the church by the laying on of hands by the current Elders and by the prayers of the congregation.

4. Accountability

In his service to the congregation, each Elder is accountable to God and to his fellow Elders.

Each Elder, in consultation with the collective current Elders, shall evaluate annually his personal ministry as an Elder. The Elders shall determine standards for such evaluation.

Concern by a church Partner about an individual Elder should be addressed first to the Elder himself, then if necessary also to the Chairman of the Elders.

5. Authority

The functional authority of individual Elders within the church is defined by the authority vested in the Elders. When representing decisions of the Elders, an individual Elder should be accorded the full authority of the board. When not representing the Elders (e.g., when expressing personal opinions), the biblical, spiritual authority of an individual Elder as an overseer and shepherd of the flock of God should be recognized and esteemed.

An Elder whose term is current may not participate in final decisions of the board concerning his re-appointment to or dismissal from the Elders.

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6. Term

An Elder shall serve for a term of two years, with a maximum of three successive two year terms. At the conclusion of a two-year term the individual Elder and the collective current Elders shall determine his continuation for another two-year term. After three such terms there will be a sabbatical of not less than one year. Any subsequent term of service shall require reappointment and confirmation on the basis of the selection process for Elders.

The terms of the Elders will overlap, so that generally some will rotate off and new ones will be selected each spring.

If any Elder has to cease serving for any reason before the end of his term, he will be replaced during the following spring's selection process (with a man serving either a full or a partial term, to be determined by the Elders according to the balance of terms overall). When deemed necessary by the Elders (for instance, if a number of Elders move away or otherwise cease serving in the middle of their terms), an extraordinary selection process may be held without waiting for the following spring.

Ministerial Staff members may be allowed to serve on the Elders without a set term.

An Elder may resign from serving as an Elder by a letter of resignation submitted to the current Elders.

7. Dismissal

If an Elder ceases to meet the biblical qualifications or to fulfill the responsibilities of the office, he may be asked by the other Elders to resign. If he is not willing to resign, the Elders have the authority to dismiss the Elder in question from the office of Elder.

B. DEACONS

1. Qualifications

BFCF understands the biblical guidelines for Deacons to include the possibility that either men or women may serve in this capacity.

The qualifications of a Deacon are described in 1 Tim. 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-6. A biblically qualified Deacon must be a man or woman who is characterized by a servant spirit, personal integrity, spiritual maturity, stability of family life, and a desire to serve the body.

A Deacon shall agree wholeheartedly, without reservation, with the *Articles of Faith* and agree not to teach contrary to or knowingly contradict the *Distinctive Beliefs*.

A Deacon shall be a Partner of this church in accordance with this Constitution.

2. Responsibilities

The collective responsibilities of the Deacons are set forth in Article 4C3. Individual Deacons will serve in accordance with their unique gifting and personality. Deacons assist the Elders in carrying out their shepherding ministry by relieving them of certain delegated tasks. Deacon ministry involves compassion, mercy, helps, service, and administrative functions on behalf of the body and under the leadership of the Elders.

Each Deacon shall invest the time necessary to insure that the responsibilities to which he/she is called are successfully accomplished. Each Deacon shall also faithfully attend meetings of the Deacons.

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3. Selection

- a. When a new Deacon is to be selected, a list shall be published of all the Partners of this church, accompanied by a written explanation of the *Responsibilities* and *Qualifications* of a Deacon (see Article 4C3 and 5B1,2). Those whose term as Deacon will be current for at least one more year will be so indicated on the list.
- b. The Elders will announce the number of new Deacons needed (see Article 4C4.) BFCF Partners will be asked to recommend to the Elders those persons among the BFCF Partners whom they think a) meet the biblical qualifications and b) would best carry out the Deacon responsibilities for the BFCF.
Prospective Deacons are normally recognized by Partners as men and women in the church who are already actively serving in deacon-like ways, to the edification of the body.
Under normal circumstances prospective Deacons will have been actively involved in the life of BFCF for at least one year and can anticipate being able to serve as Deacons for a minimum of two years.
- c. The Elders will examine the proposed Deacons (and any other whom they may deem qualified) according to the biblical standards for Deacons and the Deacon responsibilities set currently needed in the BFCF. The Elders will then compile a list of Deacon nominees. Each nominee will be approached by a Deacon or Elder to ascertain if the nominee is a) willing to serve, and b) fully understands the responsibilities of a Deacon in the BFCF. The Elders will then present a list of qualified nominees to the BFCF Partners.
- d. BFCF Partners will be asked to affirm each Deacon nominee or to indicate specific reservations. Those Partners expressing reservations will be contacted by an Elder to discuss their concerns, which will then be considered by the Elders as a whole prior to final appointment.
- e. The new Deacon nominees will then be confirmed as Deacons before the church by the laying on of hands by the Elders and the prayers of Partners of the church.

4. Accountability

In his or her service to the congregation, each Deacon is accountable to God, to the Elders, and to his fellow Deacons.

Each Deacon, in consultation with the collective current Deacons, shall evaluate annually his personal ministry as a deacon. The Deacons shall determine standards for that evaluation, subject to review by the Elders.

Concern by a church Partner about an individual Deacon should be addressed first to the Deacon himself, and then if necessary to the Chairman of the Deacons and to an Elder.

5. Authority

The functional authority of individual Deacons to accomplish specific ministry tasks is delegated by the Elders to the Deacons.

6. Term

Under normal circumstances a Deacon shall serve as a Deacon for a term of two years, with a maximum of three successive two year terms. At the conclusion of a two-year term the individual Deacon and the Elders shall determine his continuation for another two year term. After three such terms there will be a sabbatical of not less than one year. Any subsequent term of service shall require re-appointment and confirmation on the basis of the selection process for Deacons.

7. Dismissal

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If a Deacon ceases to meet the biblical qualifications or to fulfill the responsibilities of the office, he may be asked by the Elders to resign. If he is not willing to resign, the Elders have the authority to dismiss the Deacon in question from the office of Deacon.

C. MINISTERIAL STAFF

Ministerial Staff shall refer to those full-time church workers who are called by this body to minister to it. To the Ministerial Staff, along with the Elders, is entrusted the maintenance of vision and momentum in the Body.

Ministerial Staff positions may consist of a Senior Pastor and other positions as well. The Elders may designate other Ministerial Staff positions as are deemed necessary to assist the Senior Pastor in the ministry of this church. The Ministerial Staff shall be granted special esteem, by the congregation and by the Elders, as those to whom is entrusted in a special way the maintenance of vision and momentum in the Body.

The Senior Pastor is a man of special calling and gifting who is set aside for effective, full-time shepherding of the flock. His primary responsibility is the pulpit ministry, which shall involve the exposition of the Scriptures with a view to equipping the body for ministry. He normally will provide leadership in developing vision, planning, and oversight for the ministry of the BFCF, supported and assisted by the other Elders and Ministerial Staff members. The Senior Pastor shall also oversee the ministry of the other Ministerial Staff members. By virtue of his role as pastor, the Senior Pastor serves as an Elder without term.

1. Qualifications

Each member of the Ministerial Staff must be a mature believer who reflects (aside from gender considerations) the qualifications for Elder described in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9; he or she will also agree wholeheartedly, without reservation, with both the *Articles of Faith* and the *Distinctive Beliefs*. Additional qualifications for each Ministerial Staff member shall be determined by the Elders based on current needs and recorded in written form. Such additional qualifications may be adjusted as needed by the Elders in consultation with the staff member.

2. Responsibilities

Each Ministerial Staff member shall function according to a written description of his/her ministry responsibilities, determined in consultation with the Elders.

As many male members of the Ministerial Staff as deemed appropriate by the Elders may serve as Elders without term during their tenure, as long as not more than 40% of the Elders are Ministerial Staff.

3. Selection

The procedure for selection of Ministerial Staff members shall be determined and directed by the Elders. Special attention shall be given to providing means for congregational involvement and input. Final determination of Ministerial Staff members shall be by the Elders.

4. Accountability

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All members of the Ministerial Staff are accountable to God and to the Elders, and are to act as servant leaders towards the congregation. On a day-to-day basis, the Senior Pastor is the one to whom the other members of the Ministerial Staff are accountable.

Each Ministerial Staff member shall be evaluated annually concerning his/her ministry role. The Elders shall determine the methods and standards for that evaluation. The Senior Pastor shall be evaluated by the Elders, and the rest of the Ministerial Staff shall be evaluated by the Senior Pastor.

Concern by a church Partner about an individual Ministerial Staff member should be preferably addressed first to the staff member himself, or to the Senior Pastor or an Elder.

5. Authority

The authority of Ministerial Staff members is delegated by the Elders, to whom they are responsible.

A Ministerial Staff member who is an Elder may not participate in final decisions of the Elders concerning:

- 1) the filling of a position for which he/she is being considered, 2) the determination of limits and extent of authority for his/her position, 3) his/her remuneration, or 4) his/her own dismissal.

6. Remuneration

This church commits itself, as the Lord enables, to participating in the ongoing financial support of its Ministerial Staff members.

The Elders shall review at least annually the financial status of each Ministerial Staff member. This review shall include, when the Ministerial Staff member is partially supported through an agency other than this church, a review of support commitments and current support account status.

7. Term

Each Ministerial Staff member shall serve for a period of time determined in consultation with the Elders. The length of time that a Ministerial Staff member serves may be revised later by the Elders either on their own initiative or at the request of the Ministerial Staff member.

A Ministerial Staff member may resign his/her position by a letter of resignation submitted to the Elders.

8. Dismissal

If a Ministerial Staff member is found to have willfully compromised the biblical standards of moral or ethical behavior expected of church leaders, or to have regularly failed to fulfill the responsibilities of his/her position, the Elders shall request his/her resignation or may consider his dismissal.

ARTICLE 6: TEMPORALITIES

After each fiscal year has ended, an annual financial report shall be provided to the Partners.

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The Elders shall have the authority to establish and direct a non-profit organization (*Verein*) under German law, which shall have as its purpose to support and sustain the ministry of the Black Forest Christian Fellowship by providing a legitimate basis for its financial and organizational activities. The non-profit organization will be established in such a way that gives precedence to the Constitution of the Black Forest Christian Fellowship in terms of church government and spiritual focus.

In the event of dissolution of this church, all assets remaining after the satisfaction of any indebtedness shall be distributed to organizations which operate with like purposes as those set forth in the *Preamble*. This decision shall be made by the Elders, or by representatives acting on their behalf.

ARTICLE 7: AMENDMENTS

This Constitution may be revised or amended as deemed necessary or desirable by the Elders. Suggestions for changes may be made in writing by church Partners.

Any Proposed amendment shall be made available in written form and be verbally announced to the BFCF Partners on three consecutive Sundays, one of which should coincide with, whenever possible, a Congregational Meeting. Written and verbal comments from church Partners will be considered by the Elders prior to a final decision to amend this Constitution.