

CONSTITUTION OF STANMORE BAPTIST CHURCH

PREAMBLE

We, the members of Stanmore Baptist Church, willingly and seriously commit ourselves to practicing congregational worship, ministry and service in accordance with the following constitution.

Article 1: OUR NAME

The name of our church is Stanmore Baptist Church (hereafter referred to as 'SBC').

Article 2: OUR PURPOSES

2.1 SBC's Primary Purposes

The purpose of SBC is to glorify and enjoy God (Eph 3:21) by:

- worshipping him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24; 1 Peter 2:5, 9);
- witnessing to his great works of creation, rule and salvation before all people (Ps 105:1-8; Luke 24:26-48; Acts 1:8); and
- working for the good of others to demonstrate his benevolent love (Matt 5:13-16; Luke 6:27-36; Rom 15:26-27; Gal 6:10).

Therefore, we are committed, along with God's people everywhere to proclaiming God's perfect law and his gospel of grace throughout the entire world (Matt 28:19; Luke 24:47; Acts 20:20-21, 27).

2.2 Primary Means

The primary means for accomplishing these purposes are prayer and the ministry of the Word of God, publicly and privately (Acts 2:42, 6:4; 20:20;; 1 Tim 2:1-8; 2 Tim 4:1-2).

2.3 Other Means

Other means for accomplishing these purposes include supporting missionaries, planting churches, promoting Christian education, hosting conferences, publishing and distributing reformed and evangelical ministry resources, and establishing ministries of mercy and compassion (Acts 1:8, 13:1-3, Dt 6:4-9, Eph 4: 11-16, Mt 25:35-40, James 2:14-17).

Article 3: OUR BELIEFS

3.1 The Final Authority for SBC

We affirm that the Bible is the supreme and final authority in all matters of faith and practice, in every area of life (2 Tim 3:16-17)

3.2 A Summary of SBC's Beliefs

The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith (hereafter referred to as 'the Confession') is a helpful summary of the doctrines we believe at SBC and chapter 1 of that document sets out what we believe about the nature and authority of the Bible.

Article 4: REQUIREMENTS & RESPONSIBILITIES FOR SBC MEMBERS

4.1 Requirements for Membership

- The local church should be composed of those who are true disciples of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:47). Therefore to be eligible for membership a person must demonstrate repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). The person must also be baptised in obedience to the Lord's command (Matt 28:19-20).
- The members are responsible to promote and maintain unity and loving fellowship between all members (Eph 4:3). Therefore, a person must agree substantially with the Confession and constitution (1 Cor 1:10), be willing to support the various ministries at SBC (Acts 2:42) and to submit to and cooperate with the church's decisions and discipline (1 Cor 14:40; Eph 5:21; Heb 13:17; Matt 18:15-18).

4.2 Reception into Membership

- A person may apply to be a member of SBC simply by advising an elder of their desire. Upon receiving this advice, the pastor/s will provide the applicant copies of the Confession and SBC constitution. The pastor/s will generally require the applicant to participate in a pre-membership course of studies. The pastor/s will subsequently interview the applicant to determine whether or not the applicant meets the requirements for membership as stated in 4.1.
- If the applicant is or has been a member of another church, the pastor/s may contact that church to find out the person's standing with that church and the reasons for leaving (Acts 15:1-2 with 24-25). If the former church raises an objection, which the pastor/s consider valid (3 John 8-10); the applicant may be denied membership.
- If the pastor/s are satisfied that the applicant meets the requirements for membership, they will announce this to the congregation at a SBC members' meeting. Usually the pastor/s will ask the applicant to give their testimony (orally or written) to the church of their experience of the gospel of grace.
- A period shall be allowed for objections or questions to be raised privately with the pastor/s concerning the applicant's life or doctrine. If no objection is raised which the pastor/s deem to be valid, the members will be asked to express their consent (Acts 9:26-29). The church will usually receive people as SBC members at the next meeting celebrating the Lord's Supper.

4.3 Responsibilities of Membership

A Godly Corporate Life

- Members are required to attend the Sunday worship meetings, church prayer meetings, and members' meetings, unless they are prevented by circumstances outside their control (e.g. illness, unusual working conditions, etc.) (Acts 2:42; Heb 10:24-25).
- Each member is to seek the welfare of the entire body, and not merely their own (Rom 12:10). They are to actively seek to know one another; pray for one another; love, comfort, exhort and encourage one another; and bear each other's burdens (Gal 6:2). They are to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3) and exercise their gifts for the benefit of all (1 Cor 12:12-27), as God enables them.

- All members are expected to support, pray for and submit to the pastor/s of SBC (1 Thess 5:12-13; Heb 13:17).
- All members are expected to support the church through free-will offerings, as God enables them, as an act of service to God and motivated by gratitude and generosity (Mal 3:8-10; 1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 8 and 9).

A Godly Personal Life

- The church expects members to use the various means of grace that God has provided, especially Bible reading (Ps 1:2, Ps119), and prayer (Matt 6:6).
- Members are expected to practice and cultivate godliness in all areas of life (Heb 12:14).
- The members of the church are expected to obey the teachings of the Bible regarding their relationships, roles and responsibilities in the spheres of the family, church and society.
- As the God-appointed head of the family, the husband is to lead his family as Christ leads the church, with self-denying love (Eph 5:25-29). His wife is to submit to him as an integral part of her submission to Christ (Eph 5:22-24). The parents are to nurture their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. They are to set a godly example, leading them in family worship, instructing them consistently in the Scriptures, and wisely disciplining them. (Eph 6:1-4; Prov 13:24; 29:15).
- It is the duty of every member to pray and labour according to his or her God-given ability and opportunity (Rom 12:6) for the extension of the Kingdom of God both at home and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Therefore, every member should recognise and take every opportunity to bear witness to Christ by consistent Christian conduct and verbal testimony (Matt 10:32-33; Rom 10:14; 1 Peter 3:14-16).

4.4 Removal from Membership

Transfer

- When requested, the pastor/s may give a departing member a letter of commendation to another church (Acts 18:27). However, no letter will be given to a member who is at that time under the church's corrective discipline.

Exclusion

- If a member is continually and/or unreasonably absent from the church's meetings for a period of more than 3 months, they may be removed from SBC membership.
- In such cases the pastor/s will try to contact the person and resolve the situation (Ezek 34:4). However, if these efforts fail, the pastor/s will recommend to the church that the person be removed from membership.
- If the members of the church express their consent to this, the pastor/s will notify the person that they are no longer an SBC member.

Resignation

- As a general rule, a member may voluntarily resign from the membership of this church. However, because of the seriousness of church membership, members should first consult with the pastor/s.
- If after consultation the member is still determined to withdraw, the pastor/s will inform the church of the person's resignation.

- No resignation will be accepted from a person who is guilty of sin which warrants corrective discipline, and the church may proceed with public censure, suspension of privileges, or excommunication in accordance with the procedure outlined in Article 5.

Excommunication

- According to the teaching of Holy Scripture a congregation must withdraw membership privileges and exclude from its fellowship anyone who blatantly and persistently acts in a disorderly or scandalous manner or who insists on holding heretical doctrine (Matt 18:15-17; Rom 16:17; 1 Cor 5:1-13; Titus 3:10-11). The procedure to be followed in such excommunication is set out in Article 5.

4.5 Record of SBC Members

- The pastor/s are to ensure that an accurate record is maintained of each member's name, residential address, the date of reception and, where appropriate, the date of cessation of membership.

Article 5: CHURCH DISCIPLINE

The purposes of church discipline are to maintain God's honour, promote the church's welfare and purity (1 Cor 5:6), and to restore the offender to a healthy relationship with Christ and the church (1 Cor 5:5).

5.1 The Church is always under Christ's instruction and correction

- The church is always under the discipline of Christ through his instruction and correction. This is administered by the loving oversight of the pastor/s (Heb 13:17), the diligent application of the word of God (2 Tim 4:2) and the mutual care and exhortation of the members (Heb 3:12-13, 10:24-25). There are occasions, however, when this form of discipline is insufficient and corrective discipline becomes necessary.

5.2 Corrective Discipline

- This discipline becomes necessary when disorderly or scandalous conduct or heretical doctrine appears among the members of the church. In all such cases reasonable efforts must be made to resolve the difficulty, correct the error, and remove offences through counsel and admonition before further steps are taken (Gal 6:1; James 5:19-20). The principles given to us in Matt 18:15-16; Rom 16:17-20; 1 Cor 5; 2 Thess 3:6-15; 1 Tim 5:19-20 and Titus 3:10 must be carefully followed in all cases of corrective and corporate discipline.
- When admonition is not heeded, suspension of some of the privileges of membership may need to be applied, and if this measure fails, excommunication from the membership of the church may be necessary (Matt 18:17).
- If the pastor/s have failed to persuade the offender to repent, they will report this to the church at a regular or a special members' meeting and recommend that the offender be excommunicated, which is to be done by the entire church (Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 5:4). To be valid, an act of excommunication must have the approval of at least two-thirds of the members present and voting.
- It is the duty of the church to forgive and restore to membership those who give satisfactory evidence of repentance (2 Cor 2:6-8). Excommunicated members may be eligible for membership under the provisions of Article 4.

Article 6: BAPTISM & LORD'S SUPPER

- There are two ordinances of special significance which our Lord has commanded us to observe, namely, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Their administration is not absolutely necessary for a person to be saved and they do not automatically impart the grace and power of God to the recipient (Luke 23:32-43).
- However, they are powerful aids to the faith of believers when applied and received properly. Our Lord wants them to be observed for our edification and to be performed in a decent and orderly manner.

6.1 Baptism

- Only disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ are proper candidates for baptism.
- All disciples should be baptised and join a local church (Acts 2:38, 41).
- The proper mode of baptism is immersion in water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19). Believing that baptism is the God-ordained door of the entrance into the visible community of the people of God, SBC will receive into the membership of the church only those who have been baptised on profession of their faith and who meet the requirements of Article 4.1.
- In special circumstances (e.g. age, medical reasons) the church may receive those who have been baptised as believers by a mode other than immersion.

6.2 The Lord's Supper

- Whereas baptism should be observed only once by each believer, the Lord's Supper should be celebrated frequently by the assembled church (1 Cor 11:26).
- This is a holy remembrance and celebration of the Lord's death and should be observed with reverence and dignity. The bread and the cup of wine are and remain symbols of the broken body and the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 11:17-34). The church will usually celebrate the Lord's Supper once every month.

Article 7: OUR CHURCH OFFICERS

- Jesus Christ is the one and only Head of the church (Col 1:18), and He governs His church through office-bearers whom He appoints and who are empowered by His Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work.
- According to the New Testament there are only two officers: pastor or elder (the terms are used interchangeably in the NT of Acts 20:28, 1 Tim 3:1) and deacon (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1-13).
- It is the duty of the church to seek and discover among its members those to whom the Lord Jesus Christ has given the necessary gifts for these offices, to formally recognise them by common consent, to set them apart by united prayer, and to submit to their authority.

7.1 Pastors / Elders

- Whereas in a new or small church only one man may have the gifts necessary to his being recognised as a pastor, the Scriptures teach that normally there should be a plurality of pastors in a local church (Acts 20:17; Phil 1:1). Pastors have the responsibility of overseeing the development and welfare of this church (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). They are the “pastors and teachers” given to the church “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12).
- The pastor/s’ oversight of the local church includes the preaching and teaching of the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:20, 27), watching out for the welfare of every member (Heb 13:17), and leading and directing the church in the pursuit of its purposes (1 Tim 3:4-5). Such oversight must be modelled upon Jesus Christ and therefore, be gentle and gracious (Ezek 34:4; Acts 6:5) and as servants and examples to the church (1 Peter 5:3).
- The pastors of the church are all equal in office and authority (Acts 20:28; Heb 13:17), but diverse in gift and function. Each elder must be “able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2) and must be engaged in private instruction and admonition and in the administration and government of the church (Acts 20:20, 28; 1 Thess 5:12). However, some pastors may be more gifted by God, more experienced and more involved in the pastoral office (Rom 12:3-8). For example, some may be more engaged in public preaching and teaching than others (1 Tim 5:17). In view of this diversity of gift as well as the numerous and serious responsibilities of the office, it is highly desirable that at least one elder should devote himself full-time to the work. In such a case, the church is responsible to give adequate financial support, according to its ability (1 Cor 9:14; 1 Tim 5:17-18).
- The qualifications for a pastor are clearly set out in the Scriptures in 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9.

7.2 Deacons

- Deacons are to serve Christ by ministering to the church His compassionate and benevolent care for the church’s temporal welfare, so that the pastor/s can devote themselves to the priorities of prayer and ministry of the Word (Acts 6:2-4). They must fulfil the duties of their office in cooperation with and in submission to the supervision of the SBC pastor/s (1 Tim 3:10).
- Included in their duties is the responsibility of properly monitoring the church’s finances and appointing a qualified auditor to ensure that they maintain accurate records and comply with all relevant legislative requirements.
- While the deacons are not rulers in the church, their office must be held in high esteem, for by serving well they obtain for themselves a good standing (1 Tim 3:13).
- The number of deacons shall not be fixed. The church shall choose as many as are needed for the work to be done from among the men who give evidence of having the scriptural qualifications for the office.
- The qualifications for a man chosen to fulfil the office of Deacon are set out in Acts 6:3, 5 and 1 Tim 3:8-13.

7.3 Appointment of Church Officers

- The local church, under the guidance of the Scriptures and in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, is responsible for appointing men to the offices of pastor and deacon (Acts 6:3-6). Each potential officer should have an inward conviction that the Lord is calling him to this particular office, and the church should recognise that call by discerning the man's gifts and graces as required for the role. Any man called to this role must be able to affirm his substantial agreement with the Confession and his submission to the SBC Constitution. Should he at any time change his convictions respecting these, he must make this fact known to the church (Ps 34:13; Eph 4:25).
- The responsibility to recognise the gifts of Christ to His church is a matter of such gravity that it should be accompanied by much prayerful waiting on God for guidance, a careful study of the relevant passages of Scripture and an objective evaluation of each man considered for a particular office. These activities are the responsibility of each individual member of the church as well as of the church as a whole (Acts 6:1-6).

Nominations

- The pastor/s may at any time nominate a candidate or candidates for either office of elder or deacon and call a special church business meeting for their public approval (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).
- Likewise, members are free at any time to suggest to the pastor/s the names of men whom they consider to be potential future officers (Acts 6:1-7).

Congregational Vote

- Following nomination by the pastor/s, congregational approval will be sought (Acts 15:22). The name of the man nominated by the pastor/s shall be submitted to the church one month before a church members' meeting at which the nomination will be considered.
- During this period the members have a solemn obligation to prayerfully assess the nominee in the light of relevant passages of Scripture. Any member who has reservations about the man's fitness for office should contact one of the pastors. Failure to resolve the matter to the pastor/s' satisfaction may warrant postponement of the congregational vote.
- When the members meet to consider the nomination, the candidate for office and any member of his immediate family who are present shall be requested to leave the room while the qualifications are openly discussed (1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). After that a congregational vote will be taken. The nominee must be supported by at least three-quarters of the voting members present in order to be appointed to office.

Installation

- Following the recognition of an officer by congregational vote, he will be installed in his office at a regular worship meeting by prayer and the laying on of hands by the pastor/s (Acts 6:6; 14:23).

Affirmation

- Church officers will hold office as long as they are faithful to their calling and have the confidence of the congregation. The church will affirm, or express the withdrawal of, its confidence in each officer no later than five years following the date of his installation, and no later than every five years thereafter. The

procedure for affirmation will be similar to those procedures outlined in the section titled **Congregational Vote**.

- The pastor/s may at their discretion call for a vote of confidence in any officer at any time.

Termination

- Any church officer who, in examining himself before God, becomes convinced that he is no longer qualified, or for other good and valid reasons, may resign from office without prejudice to his character and standing in the church, unless some matter for discipline is involved. In any case such as this, the pastor/s, or remaining pastor/s, should be sought for counsel and direction before the resignation is offered.
- Church officers are subject to the same discipline as the other members of the church, except that two or three witnesses are necessary to confirm any accusation made against them (1 Tim 5:19-20). Any officer brought under the discipline of the church shall automatically be removed from his office until such time as he is re-appointed following procedures similar to those set out in the section titled, **Congregational Vote**.
- Any church officer who fails to retain the confidence of the congregation and is not affirmed in that office will be dismissed from the office. His standing in the church is not affected by this action unless a matter of discipline is involved.

Article 8: OUR MEMBERS' BUSINESS MEETINGS

Where the church is gathered together in His name, the Lord is present (Matt 18:20). Therefore, every SBC members' business meeting is to be conducted in an appropriate manner of reverence and spiritual unity (Eph 3:21; 4:3).

8.1 Types of Meetings

- There shall be an annual members' business meeting by 30 September of each year for presenting reports, including the audited financial report of the year ending on 30 June, electing or affirming officers, and transacting other business. Special business meetings may be called at other times at the discretion of the pastor/s.

8.2 Notice of Meetings

- Notice of all members' business meetings will generally be given by the pastor/s at regular worship meetings on the Sunday immediately before the meeting being announced. However, in the case of an emergency, a meeting may be called at shorter notice by notifying each regular member by mail, telephone or email of the time, place, and purpose of the meeting.
- The pastor/s may also call members' business meetings at short notice, without the following the notification procedures mentioned above, for presenting special reports or for seeking the counsel from the members but no vote may be taken or other business transacted at such meetings.

8.3 Quorum

The presence at the members' meeting of at least two thirds of all the members listed on SBC's record of members, as at the date of the meeting, will constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

8.4 Chairman

- One of the pastors shall preside at all members' meetings, or a person whom they designate if all the pastors are absent.
- The meeting's Chairman is responsible to make sure that no one person dominates the meeting or intimidates other members so that they are not free to express their views (1 Cor 14:40).

8.5 Agenda

- The pastor/s will determine the agenda for each members' business meeting and no other business will be conducted at that particular meeting other than that which has been scheduled. Members may approach the pastor/s to suggest matters for formal discussion at a future meeting.

8.6 Voting

- SBC members must endeavour to form their judgments and vote in submission to the Word of God and in prayerful reliance upon the Spirit of God who indwells them (Acts 6:2-7; 13:1-4).
- All members who have reached the age of eighteen years and are in good standing in the church may vote on any matter brought before the congregation.
- Unanimity of heart and mind under God shall at all times be sought and prayed for (Acts 6:5). When unanimity is not realised, then not less than a two-thirds majority of the voting members present will be required to make a resolution valid, except where a different proportion is specified in this constitution.

8.7 Minutes

All minutes of meetings are to be signed by the Chairman of that meeting as verification of the accuracy of those minutes.

Article 9: OUR RELATIONSHIPS

9.1 Jesus Christ is the head of the church

We do not acknowledge any ecclesiastical authority over SBC other than our Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is the head of the church world-wide, and therefore, of SBC (Eph 5:23). He directs the affairs of SBC through pastor/s chosen and appointed by the common consent of the members (Acts 14:21-23; Titus 1:5-9; Heb 13:7, 17). The pastor/s are always subject to the authority of the Bible (Acts 16:4; 1 Cor 7:17) and are answerable to God (Heb 13:17).

9.2 Our affiliation with others Baptist churches

We have a voluntarily affiliation with the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT.

9.3 Our cooperation with other churches

We may cooperate with other like-minded churches in matters of mutual interest and concern (2 Cor 8:18-24). We may seek their assistance (1 Cor 16:1-2) and counsel (Prov 11:14; 1 Thess 2:14) in matters of special concern. However, their decision or directions are not binding on SBC (Acts 14:21-23; Titus 1:5).

Article 10: STEWARDSHIP

10.1 Biblical Stewardship

The assets and income of SBC shall be administered with faithfulness, wisdom and transparency. Church officers shall be primarily responsible for the regular operational management of SBC assets and income. Church officers are to provide regular reports and updates to the membership, including significant financial matters requiring a membership vote.

10.2 Property Trustees

The membership shall appoint Trustees to the SBC Property Trust to act on behalf of SBC for the legal stewardship of property.

10.3 Not for Profit

The assets and income of SBC shall be applied solely to further SBC's purposes. No portion shall be directly or indirectly distributed to the members of SBC except as genuine compensation for services rendered or expenses incurred on behalf of SBC.

10.4 Dissolution

In the event of SBC being dissolved, all assets that remain after such dissolution and after the satisfaction of all debts and liabilities shall be transferred to another organisation with similar purposes, which is charitable at law and which has rules prohibiting the distribution of its assets and income to its members.

Article 11: AMENDMENTS TO THIS CONSTITUTION

- As God grants fresh light from His Word, SBC will amend this constitution and adjust our conduct accordingly (Ps 119:59-60; Acts 5:29).
- Amendments to this constitution shall require the support of at least three-quarters of the voting members present at a meeting called for this purpose. No proposed amendment may be voted on which has not been distributed to the congregation in written form at least one month before the meeting.