

CONSTITUTION OF THE EVANGELICAL BAPTIST CHURCH OF GENEVA **(February 1986)**

The purpose of this constitution is to guide the church in practical affairs and to provide a system of church government and administration in accordance with New Testament teaching and practice. It is recognised that the effective ministry of the church cannot be ensured by mere legislation, but is entirely dependent on the guidance and inspiration of God the Holy Spirit.

1. FOUNDATION

The Evangelical Baptist Church of Geneva, hereinafter referred to as "the church", was founded in September 1970 and consists of those persons who have become members accepting the Statement of Faith (see clause 2).

2. STATEMENT OF FAITH

As well as other biblical teaching, the church professes the following basic doctrines and principles:

- 2.1 The divine inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures as originally given, and their supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.
- 2.2 The unity of God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- 2.3 The creation of all things, both visible and invisible, by the Word of God; all creation being in, through and for, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God.
- 2.4 The universal sinfulness and guilt of man since the Fall, rendering him subject to God's wrath and condemnation and necessitating the regeneration of his whole being.
- 2.5 Redemption from the guilt, penalty and power of sin only through the sacrificial death (as our Representative and Substitute) of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God.
- 2.6 The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
- 2.7 The expectation of the personal return of Jesus Christ.
- 2.8 The resurrection of the just and the unjust.
- 2.9 The eternal blessedness of the redeemed and the eternal punishment of the impenitent.
- 2.10 The necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit to make the death of Christ effective to the individual sinner, granting him repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.

- 2.11 The indwelling and work of the Holy Spirit, granting new life to the believer and making gifts to the Church.
- 2.12 The unity and common priesthood of all believers, who together form the one Universal Church, the body of which Christ is the head.

3. BIBLICAL ORDINANCES

In accordance with New Testament teaching, two ordinances shall be taught and observed in the church, namely:

- 3.1 The Lord's Supper - The Lord's Supper (otherwise known as the Communion Service) shall be observed throughout the year as often as the elders decide and shall be made available to all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 3.2 Baptism - Baptism by immersion shall be administered on request to those who profess repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and whose lives bear evidence of their Christian profession.

4. MEMBERSHIP

- 4.1 The church admits, on request, professing Christians convinced of their biblical duty to belong to a local body of believers and who, voluntarily, by virtue of their becoming members of the church, accept its privileges and responsibilities.
- 4.2 The church recognises the necessity of a firm but loving discipline in order to maintain, as far as possible, the purity of the church and a witness honouring to Christ.
- 4.3 Membership is open to all who unreservedly approve the church's Statement of Faith. All those who are baptised or who meet the requirements for baptism as outlined in clause 3.2 may be welcomed into membership. Any applicant who is not baptised as a believer (normally by immersion) shall be asked to consider earnestly the New Testament teaching on baptism.
- 4.4 The purpose of such membership is to provide:
 - 4.4.1 Coherence and stability to the organisation of the church, and
 - 4.4.2 The basis for corporate government of church affairs.
- 4.5 Prospective members are welcomed into the fellowship of the church irrespective of their existing links with home churches.
 - 4.5.1 It is understood that on leaving Geneva membership will usually cease.
 - 4.5.2 Membership may also be brought to an end, on the recommendation of the elders, in the case of prolonged absence (unexplained or unreasonable) from the church, or in the case of open and unrepented sin.
- 4.6 Relying on the Holy Spirit members should seek:
 - 4.6.1 To live a life of personal purity and holiness consistent with their high calling in Christ. (2 Timothy 1: 9)
 - 4.6.2 To actively and responsibly share all aspects of the work, worship and

witness of the church, according to their calling, gifts and opportunities. (Romans 12: 3-8)

- 4.6.3 To exhibit to one another at all times the Christian virtues of "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" so that "bearing with one another and forgiving one another as the Lord forgave us, we may be bound together in the perfect unity of Christian love". (Colossians 3: 12-14)

5. CHURCH GOVERNMENT

General

- 5.1 The church is a local expression of the Universal Church of which Christ is the Head. (Colossians 1:18). Recognising the supreme headship of Christ, the government of the church shall be collegiate rather than hierarchical and shall be administered by the elders (including pastor(s)) and deacons of the church. They, together with all the members, shall earnestly seek, under the Spirit's guidance, the will of God concerning the church. The church leaders shall be appointed in the manner set out in this constitution and shall carry out their responsibilities in humility and love and in accordance with Scriptural principles.
- 5.1.1 The number of elders and deacons shall be in proportion to the size and needs of the church and therefore may vary according to the situation in any given period.
- 5.1.2 While the appointment of elders will be for an unspecified period the opportunity will be given to the church every three years to recognise afresh the ministry of each elder, providing he desires to continue.
- 5.1.3 The term of office of deacons shall be one year with the possibility of renewal annually.

Elders

- 5.2 There shall be a plurality of elders in the church who will exercise their ministry according to their gifts and calling.
- 5.3 The church will recognise and receive those whom the Lord has evidently gifted and qualified to be set apart as elders for the spiritual leadership of the church.
- 5.4 The elders shall consist only and at all times of those persons who unreservedly approve the foregoing statement of faith and have been baptised by immersion following conversion. They will individually and collectively exercise responsibility for the pastoring, preaching and teaching ministries in the church, to ensure its continual growth in the knowledge of the Lord, to maintain the unity of the faith and to prepare it for service and outreach. (Ephesians 4:11-13).
- 5.5 A member shall be accepted as an elder following the unanimous recommendation by the existing elders and the approval of the church. Any such recommendation should be communicated to each member one month before the church meeting at which the new elder's ministry is to be officially recognised. Any reservation by any member concerning the recommended candidate should be made known to the elders as soon as possible before the meeting in order to allow further prayer and discussion.

- 5.6 It is recognised that one or more elders may be set apart on a full-time basis as pastor (s).
- 5.7 The pastor is in New Testament terms an elder of equal status with the other elders, set apart specifically by God and the local church for the ministry of preaching, teaching and pastoral oversight but not in any essential way different from, or superior to, the other elders.
- 5.8 It is also acknowledged that it may be necessary to call and appoint someone for full-time ministry from outside the existing eldership of the church. Such candidates must also:
- 5.8.1 Fulfil all the conditions for eldership in the church, and
 - 5.8.2 Be suitably qualified and experienced for the pastoral ministry envisaged.

Deacons

- 5.9 The role of deacons is to assist in the government and administration of the church. Their service shall consist of specific tasks assigned to them within the framework of the ongoing ministry of the church.
- 5.10 The office of deacon shall be open to those members whose spiritual character and gifts qualify them to undertake various responsibilities in the service of the church.
- 5.11 Deacons should normally be members baptised by immersion.
- 5.12 The deacons shall be carefully and prayerfully chosen from among those who are probably already exercising their gifts in roles of responsibility within the church. Deacons shall be recommended by the elders following proposals by the church members and subject to their approval.

Church Council

- 5.13 The church council is made up of the elders and deacons. It will meet as necessary to enable the elders and deacons to interact on and to coordinate church affairs.

6. CHURCH BUSINESS MEETINGS

Purpose:

- 6.1 The church business meeting is the occasion when all the members together, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, seek the mind and will of Jesus Christ the Head of the Church, in relation to the life and work of the church.

Frequency:

- 6.2 Church business meetings shall be held not less than three times a year. The Annual General Meeting, (see note below) when yearly reports are given and budget proposals are voted, shall take place in January (or early February at the

latest). Additional meetings may be called by the elders and deacons as and when necessary. Notice must be given to members and the agenda, with any relevant documents, distributed at least 15 days prior to the meeting.

Voting:

- 6.3** Every member shall have the right to speak and vote upon any questions brought before the church at its meetings. However, legally, persons under the age of twenty may not vote on any issue which involves the church in civil or legal proceedings.
- 6.4** The purpose of voting is:
- 6.4.1 To involve each member responsibly in the affairs of the church.
 - 6.4.2 To ascertain the mind of the church on any particular issue, where a decision or action needs to be taken.
 - 6.4.3 To manifest the church's approval of certain reports and/or recommendations presented to the church meeting, e.g. finances.
- 6.5** In general, every vote should tend to unanimity but in any case no resolution can be passed without a majority of at least two thirds of the members present.

7. FINANCES

All moveable property, financial assets and real estate of the church shall be entrusted to the Association pour l'Eglise Baptiste Anglophone de Geneve - an officially registered Association under Swiss Law. The statutes of the Association are included in our Constitution. Membership of the Association is by cooption of church members by the board of the Association. In general the Annual General Meeting of the Association will be later than that of the church and the resolutions made at the Annual General Meeting of the church will be binding on the Association. The official language of the Association is French.

8. AMENDMENTS

This constitution may be amended only with the written consent of two thirds of the membership of the church.