

EVANGELICAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

Revised June 12, 2005

EVANGELICAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

BYLAWS

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INTRODUCTION

The Constitution and Bylaws are designed to help our church please God in all that we do and operate in a Biblically faithful manner. Like most church bylaws, they cover the basic issues such as membership, congregational meetings, the responsibilities and election of church officers, the use of church property, and similar points. They also cover issues that are often overlooked in bylaws, such as Biblical counseling, confidentiality, and conflict resolution. However while in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, in the case of conflicting interpretations, these bylaws are subordinate to, and shall be interpreted in light of the Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church

In creating this important guide for our church, we sought the counsel and experience of a number of fruitful, effective churches, individuals and Christian organizations. In particular, we are indebted to the following for their generous provision of sample documents, advice and encouragement:

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary - So. Hamilton, Massachusetts
Grace Chapel - Lexington, Massachusetts
Grace Community Church of the Valley - Sun Valley, California
Hope Evangelical Free Church - Mason, Ohio
Knox Presbyterian Church (EPC) - Ann Arbor, Michigan
Metro North Church (PCA) - Charleston (Goose Creek), South Carolina
Saddleback Valley Community Church - Orange County, California
Willow Creek Community Church - Chicago (South Barrington), Illinois

We are also indebted to the Institute for Christian Conciliation, whose extensive legal and counseling assistance to individual Christians, churches and denominations enables them to provide very helpful advice and documents. Their counsel has been especially valuable in helping alert us to wise precautions to take in this time of markedly diminished morals and human forbearance, and markedly increased propensity to resolve conflicts by secular legal means rather than within the body of Christ.

As the Institute for Christian Conciliation has pointed out, twenty years ago, most Americans, whether they were Christians or not, held to a common framework of basic moral values. Honesty, fairness, respect for others, self-discipline and accountability were generally viewed as commendable qualities. In recent years, however, respect for these qualities has been undermined by a growing emphasis on individualism, a diminished respect for authority, the acceptance of relative morality, and the loss of common norms and values. Because of this change, it is no longer prudent to assume that everyone holds to the same standard of common sense, fairness and justice, even within the same church. Therefore, what seems to be appropriate to one member of a church might seem to be outrageous to another member.

This loss of common values even within the church can cause a great deal of confusion and conflict. It may also expose a church to devastating lawsuits. A generation ago, very few people would ever have dreamed of suing a church. But the legal climate has changed dramatically in recent years, and today lawsuits against churches are commonplace. Part of the reason for this is that people have differing expectations as to how a church should conduct its affairs and treat its members. When these expectations are not met, a lawsuit often follows, which can ruin a church both spiritually and financially.

As Proverbs 22:3 instructs, "A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it". Realizing that the absence of common norms and values can pose a threat to the unity and well-being of our church, the Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and these Bylaws represents our means of establishing commonly agreed accepted standards for how we will treat one another and govern ourselves as a specific church body. In particular, they are designed to accomplish these goals:

1. To present clear information and avoid frustrated or misplaced expectations by providing potential members with a thorough explanation of how the church governs itself.

2. To reduce the likelihood of confusion and conflict within the church by establishing clear guidelines for governance.
3. To ensure the proper use of authority by church leaders by limiting their powers and establishing procedures that protect members from being disciplined or losing privileges without due process.
4. To give church officers and staff a measure of legal protection from being subpoenaed by a civil court to testify regarding information they receive through pastoral counseling, while at the same time providing guidelines for the necessary reporting of actual or suspected harm to others.
5. To reduce the church's exposure to legal liability by satisfying recently developed legal requirements, even in areas where we deny that the state has jurisdiction, and by requiring that potential lawsuits will be resolved through Biblical mediation or arbitration rather than through litigation.

While most people would agree that these are worthwhile goals, some may still be troubled by the amount of detail found in the Constitution and Bylaws. They might say, "Why can't we live with just a few general principles?" The answer to that question is quite simple. Because we live in a fallen world and still experience the effect of sin even as redeemed believers, we tend to interpret general principles differently and through our sometimes distorted perspectives. Hence, it is necessary to develop more detailed guidelines to reduce the possibility of misunderstandings between members and between our church and society. As Jesus instructed his disciples, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves." (Matthew 10:16).

This human need for detailed guidance is clearly reflected in Scripture. Instead of giving us only the two great commandments (love God and love your neighbor), God gave us the Ten Commandments. Further, realizing our weakness and our sinful tendency to ignore or distort His commandments, God instructed Moses to set forth dozens of detailed laws on how we should behave (see Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy). All of these laws are summed up in the two great commandments, but Jesus knew that until the world is renewed, we will still need the helpful guidance of the more detailed moral principles set forth throughout Scripture (see Matthew 5:17-7:12).

One of the places that we sometimes need this kind of detailed guidance is in the church. Scripture does not tell us exactly how to give notice or establish quorums for congregational meetings, what information should remain confidential and what may be shared with others, how long church officers should serve without reelection, or how to dispose of property if a church dissolves. The Constitution and Bylaws are designed to answer these types of questions, and will hopefully spare us from unnecessary confusion and conflict, help us to act in consistent and respectful ways, and allow us to devote ourselves to more important matters of God's kingdom.

As you read the Constitution and Bylaws, we encourage you to look up and study the Bible passages that are cited next to particular provisions. If such study does not answer all of your questions and concerns, please do not hesitate to approach our pastors or one of the elders, who will be happy to talk with you.

EVANGELICAL COMMUNITY CHURCH CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

1. Name.

The name by which this incorporated organization shall be known in law shall be Evangelical Community Church, referred to in these Constitution and Bylaws as the "church".

2. Location.

The principal location of this church shall be in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The registered office of the church shall be located in Ohio at the address of the church's registered agent. The Board of Elders may change the registered agent and address of the registered office from time to time, upon filing the appropriate statement with the Secretary of State.

3. Organizational Purpose and Limitations.

The organizational purposes of the church are:

- a. To bring honor to the triune God and promote the advancement of His Kingdom. The church shall seek to attain its purpose by promoting public worship of God, preaching and teaching of the Word of God, Christlike living by its members, mutual love and nurture, personal evangelism, missionary endeavor and cooperation with others having this same purpose - as defined more explicitly by the Statement of Purpose (see Appendix A).
- b. To operate exclusively for religious, charitable and educational purposes within the classification of legal charities; and no part of the net earnings of the church shall inure to the benefit of any individual; and no part of the activities of the organization, or any receipt of its funds, shall be utilized for any other purpose except those purposes mentioned above.
- c. To handle affairs pertaining to property and other temporal matters as required by the civil authorities.
- d. The church shall not have or issue shares of stock, and no dividends shall be paid. No part of the income or assets of the church shall be distributed to any member or officer without full consideration. The church is prohibited from lending money or guaranteeing the obligation of a member or officer of the church. No member or officer has any vested right, interest or privilege in or to the assets, property, functions, or activities of the church. The church may contract for goods and/or services in due course, for reasonable consideration, with its members or officers without violating this provision.

4. Constitution.

The Constitution of the Evangelical Community Church, which is subordinate to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, consists of its doctrinal standards as set forth in The Westminster Confession of Faith, along with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms and The Book of Order (consisting of The Book of Government, The Book of Discipline, and The Book of Worship). The standards set forth in The Book of Order regulate the government, discipline and worship of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

5. Incorporation and Principles of Organization.

- a. The church shall be organized as a nonprofit corporation under the laws of the State of Ohio.

- b. Recognizing that Jesus Christ is the head of this church, the church shall establish a Board of Elders, otherwise known as “the Session,” which has the authority and responsibility to organize, guide and direct all church activities. This authority shall be in accord with the Word of God, the Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Statement of Purpose, the Membership Covenant and the stated organizational purposes of this church.

6. Membership.

- a. Membership shall be determined as provided for in the constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, especially as set forth in the Book of Government, Chapters 6 and 9.
- b. The steps necessary to become an active member are the following, in accordance with the Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, especially as set forth in the Book of Government ,Chapter 9.
 - (1) By being baptized or professing previous baptism, and
 - (2) Signing the Membership Covenant, and.
 - (3) By meeting with an assigned group of Elders, giving witness of their faith in Christ, completing the membership process, and being recommended to membership in Evangelical Community Church for final approval by the Board of Elders, or
 - (4) By reaffirmation as found in Chapter 9 of the Book of Government.
- c. Right to vote: All active members in good standing in the church shall be voting members. ["Good standing" means that a member is not presently under official disciplinary action.] Any voting member in attendance at a duly called meeting shall be entitled to one vote on matters brought before the congregation. Voting by proxy will not be permitted.
- d. Separation of members: Members may be removed from membership under the following circumstances:
 - (1) By death.
 - (2) By member's request.
 - (3) By action of the Session.
 - (a) Members who are excommunicated as a result of a judicial process according to the Book of Discipline of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.
 - (b) Due to inactivity according to the process prescribed in the Book of Government, Chapter 9 of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.
 - (c) Upon renunciation of the Session’s jurisdiction as provided for in the Book of Discipline, Chapter 3-5 of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.
- e. Activities of members: Elected officers must be members in good standing.
- f. Activities of non-members: Non-members are not eligible to vote in congregational meetings or serve in elective offices, but may engage in worship and such other areas of ministry in this church as may be permitted under policies and conditions established by the Session.
- g. Affiliate members: We will have affiliate members particularly as described in the Book of Government, Chapter 9.

7. The Session.

- a. The nature and duties of the Session are those provided for in the constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian

Church, particularly as set forth in the Book of Government, Chapter 16.

- b. Qualifications: Elders shall meet the requirements for Elders as outlined in Titus 1:6-9 and I Timothy 3:2-7 (see Appendix C), shall be a member of the church in good standing, shall have served in the Church (universal) in functions requiring responsible leadership and be able to affirm the ordination vows in the Book of Government, Chapter 14.
 - c. Constituency: The Session shall consist of at most eighteen (18) members, constituted as follows:
 - (1) The Congregation can determine in any year to change the total number of Session members for the following year, up to a maximum of eighteen (18) members.
 - (2) No interim, assistant or part-time member of the Pastoral Staff may serve on Session.
 - (3) When discussing any matter requiring confidentiality, such as personnel matters relating to Pastoral Staff members, the Session may go into an executive meeting, at which time all non-members will absent the meeting.
 - (4) When discussing any matter entailing a possible conflict of interest with any Session member, such as any matter in which they or their relatives might experience material benefit, or a church discipline issue relating to them or their relatives, etc., the affected member and/or Elder(s) will absent the meeting for the duration of the Session's consideration of that matter.
 - (5) The officers of the Session shall be as provided for in the Book of Government, Chapter 16-9 of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The Session may appoint additional non-Session members to perform duties to assist the Session in their meetings, but such person(s) shall in no way be [a] member(s) of the Session.
 - d. Elders shall be elected according to the provision of the Book of Government of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Chapter 11.
 - e. Term of Service: Each appointed Elder shall serve a three-year term (with one third of the terms expiring each year). A second consecutive term, either partial or full, is permitted. A full term may be followed by a partial term, or vice versa. An Elder having served a total of six consecutive years, or a partial and a full term, shall be ineligible for re-appointment for a period of at least one year.
8. Pastoral Staff.
- a. Duties: To be carried out in the power of and in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, shall include:
 - 1. Nurture members to Christlike maturity in character and conduct.
 - 2. Equip members for ministry.
 - 3. Help provide vision; communicate the vision to all members; and empower, motivate and encourage each other in articulating and carrying out the vision in their areas of ministry.
 - 4. Provide leadership and direction to the church.
 - 5. Be responsible for the public worship services and be devoted to the proclamation of Scripture, for the purposes of God's glory and changed lives.
 - 6. Pray for the church, share in the administration of the sacraments (communion, baptism) with other church members, and lead the church in an exemplary fashion.
 - 7. A pastoral staff member may, with the approval of the Session, be a voting member of, but not

chairperson of, any committee or board.

- b. Qualifications: Pastors shall meet the requirements for Elders as outlined in Titus 1:6-9 and I Timothy 3:2-7 (see Appendix C) and shall possess such other specific qualifications as may be deemed appropriate and necessary for their particular position by the Board of Elders.
 - c. Calling: The calling of a Pastor or Associate Pastor will be as provided for in the Book of Government of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, especially as set forth in Chapter 11.
 - d. Dissolution of Call: The dissolution of a pastoral relationship shall be done in accordance with the Book of Government of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, especially as set forth in Chapter 15.
9. Board of Deacons.
- a. The Evangelical Community Church shall have a board of deacons as provided for in Book of Government, Chapters 10 and 16 of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.
 - b. Qualifications: Deacons shall meet the requirements for Deacons as outlined in Acts 6:2-3 and I Timothy 3:8-12 (see Appendix C), and shall be members of the church in good standing and be able to affirm the ordination vows found in Book of Government, Chapter 14.
 - c. Constituency: The Board of Deacons shall consist of the number of Deacons required to meet its ministry needs as approved by the Congregation. The Deacons shall elect from their membership a Chairperson and other positions as required.
 - d. Deacons shall be elected as provided for in Book of Government, Chapter 11 through the Nominating Committee. If there are more candidates than positions available, the candidates with the most votes will fill the available offices.
 - e. Term of Service: Each appointed Deacon shall serve a three year term (with one third of the terms expiring each year). A second consecutive term, either partial or full, is permitted. A full term may be followed by a partial term, or vice versa. A Deacon having served a total of six consecutive years, or a partial and a full term shall be ineligible for re-appointment for a period of at least one year.
 - f. Termination of Service: The ministry of a Deacon will be terminated by death or by resignation. In addition, a Deacon may be removed from office as the result of, for example, moral failure or failure to adequately fulfill the responsibilities of the office, by a two thirds (2/3) affirmative vote by the Session.
10. Committee and Other Appointments.
- a. Nominating Committee.
 - (1) Duties: The Nominating Committee shall prayerfully conduct the nomination process for all officers and other persons normally elected by the congregation at a congregational meeting. At least 120 days before the congregational meeting the Nominating Committee shall invite the congregation to suggest nominees for offices and other positions to be filled by election at the congregational meeting. At least 90 days before the congregational meeting the Nominating Committee shall present to the Board of Elders a list of potential nominees to be reviewed for disqualification based on biblical principles. After review by the Board, the Committee shall contact an appropriate number of candidates for the offices to be filled, requesting that each prayerfully evaluate his or her qualifications and availability for the particular position: candidates for Elder, the Qualifications in Appendix C, and all other candidates, the Qualifications for Deacon in Appendix D. Should any candidate be disqualified, the Committee shall submit to the Board another candidate and repeat the process. The slate of nominees shall be posted to the

congregation not less than 21 days prior to the congregational meeting. ***The slate should contain one more candidate than there are open positions for the office of Elder and an equal number of candidates as there are open positions for Deacons, Trustee, and Nominating Committee.*** Prior to the election any member of the congregation knowing any reason why a nominee is not Biblically qualified shall give evidence to the Nominating Committee for consideration. Should a nominee be disqualified, the Nominating Committee shall submit another qualified nominee. The slate of nominees shall be submitted to the congregation at the congregational meeting for election by the affirmative vote of voting members in attendance. Voting shall be by secret ballot. ***Any candidate, to be elected to the office for which they were nominated, must receive a simple majority of the votes cast (a minimum of 50% of votes cast, plus one vote). If there are more candidates than positions available, those candidates receiving the most votes, but not less than a simple majority, will fill the available offices. If a sufficient number of nominees fail to be elected, the Nominating Committee shall submit new nominations at a congregational meeting.***

Pre-qualified nominations may also be received from the floor of any congregational meeting held for the purpose of electing Elders, Deacons, Trustees or members of the Nominating Committee. Since these Bylaws provide for a review of the qualifications of any proposed candidate for an elected position prior to their being presented to the congregation, no less care should be given to those candidates submitted from the floor. Therefore, before a nomination can be considered from the floor of a congregational meeting, the proposed candidate's name must be submitted in writing to the Nominating Committee at least two weeks prior to the election for review by the Board of Elders. The Nominating Committee will then contact the proposed candidate requesting their own prayerful self evaluation of their qualifications and availability to serve in the particular position for which they were nominated. Subsequently, as with all other proposed candidates, the Board of Elders will review the qualifications of the individual prior to presentation to the congregation. As in all other cases, if the Board of Elders finds that the proposed candidate is not qualified, the person will not be permitted to be nominated from the floor.

Vacancies in any position in the church normally elected by the congregation shall be filled for the unexpired term by nomination by the Nominating Committee (after satisfactory review of the candidate's qualifications by the Board of Elders) and election by the congregation at a congregational meeting held for that purpose with at least two weeks prior notice. In the event of filling an unexpired term, the Nominating Committee need only propose one candidate for each opening.

- (2) Qualifications: All members of the Nominating Committee shall meet the qualifications for Deacon as outlined in Acts 6:2-3 and I Timothy 3:8-12 (see Appendix D), and shall be a member of the church in good standing.
- (3) Constituency: The Nominating Committee shall consist of: Two elders currently on Session, one deacon currently serving on the Deacon Board, one trustee currently serving on the Board of Trustees and five members of the congregation at large, all elected at a congregational meeting. No at large member may be currently serving on the Session, Board of Deacons, or Board of Trustees. The chairman of the Nominating Committee shall be appointed by the Session from one of the two Elder representatives elected by the Session. No full-time Staff member is eligible for this Committee.
- (4) Term of Service: The term of service is one year. The congregationally elected members of the Nominating Committee shall not serve more than two consecutive terms.

b. Board of Trustees.

The Evangelical Community Church will have a Board of Trustees as provided for in the Book of Government Chapter 7.

- (1) Duties: In addition to the duties set forth in the Book of Government, the Trustees shall also be delegated the following: Under the authority of the Board of Elders, the Board of Trustees shall act on behalf of the Corporation (church) to: provide, safeguard and maintain church facilities and property; provide operating procedures and systems; provide sound and efficient financial and business controls; manage monies and other financial resources; and execute contracts. Similarly, the Board of Trustees shall: have charge and custody of and be responsible for all funds and securities of the church; receive and give receipts for money's due and payable to the church from any source, and deposit all monies in the church's name in banks or other depositories; submit the books to a Certified Public Accountant or other accountant as may be directed by the Board of Elders.
 - (2) Qualifications: Trustees shall meet the Qualifications for Deacons as outlined in Acts 6:2-3 and I Timothy 3:8-12 (see Appendix D), shall be a member in good standing, and shall not currently be an Elder or Deacon.
 - (3) Constituency: The Board of Trustees shall consist of nine (9) Trustees. The Trustees shall elect from their membership a President, Vice President, Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer and Secretary.
 - (4) Appointment: The appointment of a Trustee requires the review and approval of the Nominating Committee and the affirmative vote of church members present at a business meeting held with two Sundays prior public notice. If there are more candidates than positions available, the candidates with the most votes will fill the available offices.
 - (5) Term of Service: Each appointed Trustee shall serve a three year term (with one third of the terms expiring each year). A second consecutive term, either partial or full, is permitted. A full term may be followed by a partial term, or vice versa. A Trustee having served a total of six consecutive years, or a partial and a full term, shall be ineligible for re-appointment for a period of at least one year.
- c. Termination of Service: The ministry of any person elected by the congregation will be terminated by death or by resignation. In addition, any such person may be removed from their office as the result of, for example, moral failure or a failure to adequately fulfill the responsibilities of their office, by a two thirds (2/3) affirmative vote of the Session.

11. Congregational Meetings.

Congregational meetings will be called and conducted according to Book of Government, Chapter 8 of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

- a. The congregation shall meet annually to elect Elders, Deacons, Trustees and congregational representatives to the Nominating Committee (see Bylaw 10.a.1), to adopt an annual budget, and to transact any other business as may come before the meeting.
- b. A congregational meeting shall be called for any decision concerning: a proposed amendment to the Bylaws or articles of incorporation; the election of officers (see Bylaw 10.a.1); the calling of a pastor; the purchase or disposition of real estate used or intending to be used for ministry of the church; the dissolution of the church; or denominational affiliation. The purpose of a meeting shall be announced in advance when involving any of these matters. When a meeting is called for the transaction of specific matters of business, no business shall be conducted except that which is stated in the notice.

12. Church Records.

- a. The Session shall be responsible to ensure that the following records are kept:
 - (1) Minutes of its meetings and a record of the administration of baptisms, dedications, weddings and funerals, and changes in the membership of the congregation.
 - (2) Minutes of the meetings of the congregation.
 - (3) Lists of the members in the congregation, with the dates of their reception.
 - (4) Resolutions adopted by the Board of Elders.
 - (5) Appropriate accounting records.
 - (6) Its articles or restated articles of incorporation and all amendments to them currently in effect.
 - (7) Its Bylaws or restated Bylaws and all amendments to them currently in effect.
- b. A member shall be entitled to review, after submitting a written request to the Board of Elders, any of the church records described above, providing the Board of Elders or its designate approves the written request. Financial statements, which are independently audited on an annual basis, will always be available to any member upon request. Anything other than nominal expenses shall be borne by the member. The Board of Elders shall determine the expenses to be paid by the member to obtain the information, and all other terms and conditions. The Board shall prohibit access to any records that contain confidential information about another particular person or persons.

13. Biblical Counsel and Pastoral Care.

- a. All Christians encounter situations in life concerning how best to honor and please God. In addition, all Christians struggle with sin and the effect it has on our lives and our relationships (Rom 3:23, 7:7-25). Whenever a Christian, through private efforts, is unable to discern the Lord's will in a matter or is having difficulty in overcoming sinful attitudes or behaviors, Scripture indicates that the individual should seek assistance from pastors, elders or other Godly believers. (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16; 2 Tim 3:16-4:2; Heb 10:24-25; James 5:13-16). Therefore this church encourages and enjoins its members to seek counsel from and, as appropriate, to make confession to each other.
- b. We believe that the highest priority of life is to honor and obey God in all things, and that the Bible provides thorough guidance and instruction for our faith and life. Therefore, our counsel and pastoral care shall be based on Scriptural principles, and shall exclude any and all principles, techniques, or information contrary to Scripture from the fields of psychology, psychiatry, philosophy or other sources. Neither the pastoral nor the lay care givers of this church will be serving as licensed psychotherapists or mental health professionals, and should not be expected to follow the methods of such specialists.
- c. Members who have significant legal, financial, psychological, medical, or other technical questions or needs should seek advice from independent professionals. Our pastoral and lay care givers shall be available to cooperate with such advisors and help others to consider their advice in the light of relevant Scriptural principles.

14. Confidentiality.

- a. The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and/or private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect (see Matt 7:12). It also discourages harmful gossip (Prov 16:28, 26:20), invites confession (see Prov 11:13, 28:13; James 5:16), and encourages people to seek needed Biblical counsel and pastoral care (Prov 20:19, Rom 15:14). Since these goals are essential to the ministry of the gospel and the work of this church, all members are expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidences of others.

In particular, our pastoral staff, elders, staff and volunteers who are ministering within the bounds and authority of recognized ministries and offices of the church, shall carefully keep confidential and protect all personal information they receive through Biblical counsel and pastoral care in one-on-one sessions, group meetings or other ministries, subject to the following guidelines.

- b. Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as possible, there are times when it is appropriate to reveal certain personal information to others without obtaining prior informed consent from the person(s). In particular, when members, pastors, elders or designated staff of this church believe it is Biblically or legally necessary, they may disclose confidential information to appropriate people in any of the following circumstances:
 - (1) When the person who disclosed the information or any other person is in imminent danger or risk of serious harm unless others intervene (see Prov 24:11-12).
 - (2) When required by state or federal law, such as the required reporting of suspected abuse or neglect of a child or the elderly.
 - (3) When a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to institute disciplinary proceedings, including possibly the communication with pastors or elders of another church with which the person has become affiliated (see Matt 18:15-20 and Bylaw 16). All such proceeding shall be conducted in accordance with the Book of Discipline of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.
- c. The pastors, elders, staff and volunteers may, but need not, provide individuals with written notice of these confidentiality provisions, but these provisions shall be in effect regardless of whether or not such notice is given.

15. Conflict Resolution.

- a. The church is committed to resolving in a Biblical manner all conflicts that may arise in our body. [A conflict is any clash or divergence of opinion or interest.] This commitment is based on God's command that Christians should strive earnestly to live at peace with one another (Matt 5:9; John 17:20-23; Rom 12:18; Eph 4:1-3) and that when conflicts arise, Christians should resolve them according to the principles set forth in Scripture (Prov 19:11; Matt 5:23-25, 18:15-22; 1 Cor 6:1-8; Gal 6:1). We believe that these commands and principles are required of all Christians and essential for the well-being and work of the church. Therefore, conflicts in this church shall be resolved according to Biblical principles, as provided by this Bylaw.
- b. When a member of this church has a conflict with another member or group of members, the member shall attempt to resolve the matter as follows:
 - (1) The member having the conflict shall prayerfully examine him- or herself and take responsibility for his or her contribution to the conflict (Matt 7:3-5), and shall prayerfully seek to discern whether the conflict is so serious that it must be addressed (Prov 19:11; see also Prov 12:16, 15:18, 17:14, 20:3; Eph 4:1-3; Col 3:12-15; 1 Pet 4:8).
 - (2) If the conflict is so serious it must be addressed, the member with the conflict shall go, repeatedly if necessary, and talk to the other(s) in an effort to resolve the matter personally and privately, having first confessed one's own wrong-doing, if any, and asking forgiveness (Matt 18:15).
 - (3) If the other(s) will not listen and if the conflict is so serious it must be addressed, the member with the conflict shall return with one or two other people who will attempt to help the parties resolve their differences (Matt 18:16); these other members may be members or officers of the church, other respected Christians, or trained mediators or arbitrators (conciliators) from a Christian conciliation ministry. At the request of either party to the conflict, the church shall make every effort to assist the parties in resolving their differences and being reconciled.
- c. Employment disputes and performance issues shall be resolved according to the procedures set forth in the Employee Policy Manual of this church.

- d. If a conflict arises between a member and the church, or between a group of members and the church, and cannot be resolved through the internal procedures described above, it shall be resolved through external Christian Conciliation as follows:

[When a conflict reaches this point and cannot be resolved internally, it is necessary to get help from outsiders. The question is simply, 'which outsiders'? The Bible admonishes Christians to turn to other Christians, rather than to the civil court system - to solve our conflicts on the basis of Biblical principles rather than by the ways and values of the world. (I Cor 6:1-8). Christian conciliation is a process for reconciling people and resolving conflicts out of court in a Biblical manner. The process is conciliatory rather than adversarial in nature, encouraging honest communication and reasonable cooperation rather than unnecessary contention, accusation and defense. The goals are not simply to resolve the dispute according to the law of the land, but to resolve it according to Biblical principles of honesty, accepting responsibility for one's actions and admitting wrongs, keeping one's word, being open to forgiveness and reconciliation, etc. The goals of Christian conciliation are not only to resolve the conflict, but to preserve and enhance relationships, encourage practice and growth in Christlike character and conduct, provide a positive witness, avoid negative publicity, and reduce costs.

In general, Christian conciliation includes individual counseling, mediation and arbitration. Mediation is a process in which one or more mediators (Christians committed to Biblical principles) meet with the parties in the conflict to promote constructive dialogue and encourage a voluntary settlement of differences. If settlement is not reached in mediation, the parties may proceed to arbitration, where arbitrators (Christians committed to biblical principles) will hear their case and render a legally binding decision. While mediation helps people to see what they should do as a matter of conscience, arbitration will determine what people must do as a matter of law. In both mediation and arbitration the parties have a say in the choice of the persons serving as mediator(s) or arbitrator(s), and in both cases each party is welcome to have the counsel of their own private attorneys and other advisors. For further information, see *The Christian Conciliation Handbook*, published by the Institute for Christian Conciliation, 1537 Avenue D, Suite 352, Billings, MT 59102]

- (1) The conflict must be submitted to mediation and, if necessary, legally binding arbitration in accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the Institute for Christian Conciliation.

[The Rules of Procedure have been created by the Institute for Christian Conciliation as a service to the Christian community. These Rules are a sequence, written in plain English, of Biblically-based steps to be followed by a mature Christian, a local Christian conciliation ministry, a church, the Institute for Christian Conciliation or other parties to help bring conciliation between two parties in conflict. The Rules cover mediation, during which most conflicts will be resolved, and continue on through legally binding arbitration for those instances where necessary. The rules covering legally binding arbitration are approved and accepted in United States courts of law. The Rules of Procedure are included in *The Christian Conciliation Handbook*, referenced above.]

- (2) All mediators and arbitrators shall be in agreement with the Statement of Faith, Membership Covenant, and form of government of this church, unless this requirement is modified or waived by all parties to the conflict. If a conflict involves an attempted revision of the Statement of Faith or form of government, the mediators and arbitrators shall be in agreement with those documents as they existed prior to the attempted revision.
- (3) This section covers the church as a corporate entity and its agents, including its pastors, officers, staff, and volunteers with regard to any actions they may take in their official capacities.
- (4) This section covers any and all conflicts or claims arising from or related to church membership, doctrine, policy, practice, counseling, discipline, decisions, actions or failures to act, including claims based on civil statute or for personal injury.

- (5) By joining this church, all members agree that these methods shall provide the sole remedy for any conflict arising against the church and its agents, and they waive their right to file any legal action against the church in a civil court or agency, except to enforce an arbitration decision.
- (6) If a conflict or claim involves an alleged injury or damage to which the church's insurance applies, and if the church's insurer refuses to submit to mediation or arbitration as described in this section, either the church or the member alleging the injury or damage may declare that this section is no longer binding with regard to that part of the conflict or claim to which the church's insurance applies.

16. Church Discipline.

All matters of church discipline shall be conducted in accordance with the Book of discipline of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

17. Interpretation of Scripture.

a. Premise:

The church will face many decisions in its future which will not be explicitly covered by a Statement of Faith or a confession. There will remain many areas uncovered which will require position statements, decisions and/ or actions.

b. Basis:

The church will look to the Holy Scriptures for its faith and practice. Since the Scriptures are God's written Word, they are free from error as originally written and must be the source of authority and decision making for the church. In its decision making, the church will take into consideration historic confessional statements, church history and tradition, and the wealth of knowledge to be found within the writings of church leaders and theologians. However, the ultimate truth of God may only be found with absolute certainty in His Word.

c. Commitments:

The church, its leaders, staff and members agree to strive to please God in all things and to abide by the teaching of Scripture. We will strive not only to understand the Scriptures, but when understood, to stand under its teaching and instruction. Both our individual and corporate lives will be placed under the authority of God's Word.

d. Freedom of Conscience:

Only the Lord may bind the conscience of an individual. No church council, statement, or decision has such authority over the conscience of an individual. However, all church members have the responsibility to understand and stand under the Word of God. Where the Scriptures do not speak explicitly and/or clearly, the church and its members will allow for appropriate different beliefs and practices. We will agree to disagree agreeably showing grace, understanding, love and respect. At no time will the church require any member, staff person or leader to practice or endorse what he or she individually does not believe is taught in the Scriptures. However, at no time will the church permit any member, staff person or leader to promote any belief which contradicts the Statement of Faith or Membership Covenant.

e. Process:

When difficult or controversial issues come to the attention of the Session, the Session will assess the seriousness of the matter in terms of the potential harm to the church members and potential displeasure to God. If two-thirds (2/3) of the Elders indicate the issue should be investigated, the following process shall be followed:

- (1) The Elders will appoint a balanced special study group representing the range of views on a given topic.
- (2) The Elders will give the special study group a basic definition of the issue or question at hand, outline goals and objectives, and determine a time frame for completion of the work.

- (3) The special study group will consist of 6 to 10 persons and will include both lay and staff participants.
- (4) The special study group will choose a chairperson, determine how it will do its work, report to the congregation and Elders on a regular basis, and submit a final report to the spiritual leaders for discussion and resolution.
- (5) The special study group will always use the Scriptures as its ultimate rule for faith and practice.
- (6) As the special study group proceeds in its work to understand the Scriptures, it may call upon various resource persons and use sources other than the Scriptures such as commentaries, confessions, Bible dictionaries and study materials.
- (7) Study group reports will be sent to the Session for a final vote and recommendation. A process of education of the congregation on the issue and decision of the Session will then be undertaken.
- (8) Prior to the completion of the work of the special study group and the implementation of the decisions and policies of the Elders, the church will implement interim policies which the Elders believe have the greatest potential to please God.
- (9) Whenever the church is facing a difficult decision, members will be asked to bathe the special study group, Session and the congregation in prayer, asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, wisdom from God and the mind of Christ.

18. Ownership and Distribution of Property.

- a. The church corporation shall hold, own, and enjoy its own personal and real property, without any right of reversion to another entity, except as provided in these Bylaws.
- b. "Dissolution" means the complete disbanding of the church so that it no longer functions as a congregation or a corporate entity. Upon the dissolution of the church, its property shall be disposed of according to the Book of Order, especially section 5-5, of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church:

19. Indemnification.

- a. General.

The Session may choose to indemnify and provide the church-related expenses of any officer, employee, or agent of the church.

- b. Officers.

Subject to the provisions of paragraph c of this Section, the church shall indemnify any Officer (i.e. Elder, Deacon or Trustee) or former Officer of the church against claims, liabilities, expenses, and costs necessarily incurred by the Officer in connection with the defense, compromise, or settlement of any action, suit or proceeding, civil or criminal, in which such person is made a party by reason of being or having been an Officer, to the extent not otherwise compensated, indemnified or reimbursed by insurance, if:

- (1) The conduct of the Officer was in good faith, and
- (2) The Officer reasonably believed that their conduct was in the best interests of the church, or at least was not opposed to its best interests, and
- (3) In the case of any criminal proceeding, the Officer had no reasonable cause to believe that this conduct was unlawful.

- c. The church may not indemnify an Officer in connection with a proceeding brought against them or in the right of the church, in which the Officer was adjudged liable to the church, or where the Officer is charged with receiving an improper personal benefit and is adjudged liable on that basis.

20. Rules of Order.

All meetings of the church, the Session, and its various boards and committees shall be conducted in accord with the Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and Roberts Rules of Order.

21. Amendment of Bylaws.

These Bylaws may be amended or repealed only by the affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of the voting members present at a duly-called meeting of the church for such purposes.

APPENDIX A: STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of the Evangelical Community Church is to *magnify* the Lord our God by bringing people to Jesus and *membership* in His family, developing them to Christlike *maturity*, and equipping them for *ministry* and *mission* in the church and world - under the guidance of and in the power of the Holy Spirit. We shall do this in the following ways:

A. MAGNIFY:

Encourage, and provide an atmosphere for, personal and corporate worship where God is magnified, honored, revered and enjoyed.

Matthew 22:37, Psalms 34:1, 48:1, 96:2; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 13:15.

B. MEMBERSHIP:

Within the fellowship of believers, strive toward full participation in the benefits and responsibilities of members of the family of God. Strive toward maturity in love, purity and unity. This will be encouraged through Biblically-based loving lifestyles, including praying for one another, listening, caring, bearing others' burdens, speaking and living truths in love, stirring up one another to love and good deeds, and other Christlike traits.

Matthew 28:19-20; Galatians 6:2; Hebrews 10:24-25; I Corinthians 12.

C. MATURITY:

Encourage maturity in Christ through the knowledge of and obedience to the Word of God; an intimate, personal relationship and daily walk with Jesus Christ; and the development of Christlike character, conduct and wholeness--through prayer and Bible-centered preaching and teaching, intentional disciple-building relationships, guidance and Christlike modeling.

Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 12:30-31; Ephesians 4:24; I Timothy 4:7-8; II Timothy 2:2.

D. MINISTRY:

Strive to demonstrate God's love to others by blessing them, meeting their needs, healing their hurts and/or setting them free, in the name of Jesus. This will be encouraged through training in practical skills for loving and by encouraging in each person the discovery, development and use of one's spiritual gift(s) and ministry skills.

Matthew 22:39; Luke 4:16-19; Ephesians 4:1-16.

E. MISSION:

Seek to have compassion on and bring relatives, friends, neighbors, and others in and beyond our community to a saving knowledge of Christ, membership in His family and maturity, through our personal and corporate lives, prayer, love and witness, and through our support of missionary activities in and beyond our community.

Matt 28:19-20; Col 4:2-6; II Corinthians 2:14-15, 15:17-20.

APPENDIX B: MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

Having received Christ as my Lord and Savior and been baptized, and understanding and being in agreement with the Statement of Faith and Statement of Purpose, and choosing to abide by the Constitution and Bylaws of Evangelical Community Church (ECC), I now feel led by the Holy Spirit to unite with the ECC church family. In so doing, I commit myself to God and to the other members to aim to do the following, as God enables me:

1. *I will maintain harmonious relationships within my church* (Rom 14:19).

- ... by acting in love toward other members (I Pet 1:22).
- ... by refusing to gossip (Eph 4:29).
- ... by following the leaders as they follow the Lord (Heb 13:17).

2. *I will share the responsibility of my church.*

- ... by praying for the salvation and growth of people (Matt 28:19-20, I Peter 2:2).
- ... by inviting the unchurched to attend (Luke 14:23).
- ... by warmly welcoming those who attend (Rom 15:7).

3. *I will serve the ministry of my church.*

- ... by demonstrating God's love to all people (Matt 22:39).
- ... by discovering and using my gifts and talents (I Pet 4:10).
- ... by developing a servant's heart and lifestyle (Phil 2:3,4,7).

4. *I will support the purposes of my church.*

- ... by attending faithfully (Heb 10:25).
- ... by growing in Christlikeness (I Tim 4:7-8).
- ... by giving regularly (I Cor 16:2).

Name (Print)

Signature

Date

Covenant Representative for the Board of Elders

MEMBERSHIP COVENANT SCRIPTURE

1. I will maintain harmonious relationships within my church.

Rom 14:19 (Phillips). *"So let us concentrate on the things which make for harmony, and on the growth of our fellowship together."*

I Peter 1:22 (Today English Version). *"Have a sincere love for other believers, love one another earnestly with all your heart."*

Eph 4:29. *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs."*

Heb 13:17. *"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be no advantage to you."*

2. I will share the responsibility of my church.

Matt 28:19-20 (New International Version). *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father ... the Son and ... the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."*

I Peter 2:2. *"Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation."*

Luke 14:23 (New International Version). *"Then the master told his servant. 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.'"*

Rom 15:7 (The Living Bible). *"So, warmly welcome each other into the church, just as Christ has warmly welcomed you; then God will be glorified."*

3. I will serve the ministry of my church.

Matt 22:39. *"... You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

I Peter 4:10 (Phillips). *"Serve one another with the particular gifts God has given each of you."*

Phil 2:3,4,7. *"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Who ... [took on] the very nature of a servant."*

4. I will support the purposes of my church.

Heb 10:25. *"Let us not give up meeting together ... but let us encourage one another."*

I Tim 4:7-8. *"Train yourself in godliness [which] is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."*

I Cor 16:2 (The Living Bible). *"Each one of you, on the first day of the week, should set aside a specific sum of money in proportion to what you have earned and use it for the offering."*

APPENDIX C: BIBLICAL ROLE AND QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS

In the early church, as local churches were established in the faith, and when more than one person became qualified, elders were appointed to continue the pastor-teaching ministry in each local church. Hence to the elders were given the oversight of that particular church body, and the shepherding of its members. (Acts 20:28-32; I Tim 3:1-7; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5-9; I Tim 5:17; I Peter 5:1-4).

THE BIBLICAL ROLE OF THE ELDERS

1. Shepherd The Flock:

Serving in all humility, elders are to guide, direct, guard and protect the members of the body, seeking to meet their needs and assist in any way possible, warning against harmful influences and guarding against false teachers. (Acts 20:28ff; I Peter 5:1-3).

2. Lead Through Example:

Elders are to provide a Scriptural role model and are to set a pattern before the flock of a rightly ordered life - with a single purpose of glorifying God. (I Peter 5:3).

3. Teach and Exhort:

Elders are to see that the flock is fed through insightful and accurate Biblical instruction and admonition. (I Tim 3:2; II Tim 2:2; Titus 1:9).

4. Exercise Church Discipline:

Elders are to confront those who are teaching what they should not teach or who are continuing a pattern of behavior contradictory to Biblical truth. Thus, elders are to keep closing potential entrances for Satan, so that the truth of Christ will remain credible to both the congregation and the community. (Acts 20:29-31; Titus 1:9).

5. Manage The Church of God:

Elders are to oversee the life of the church, with the assistance of deacons and other godly leaders. They must be people who can "rule well." (I Tim 3:5, 5:17).

6. Pray For The Sick:

Elders are to pray for the spiritual and physical well-being of members of the congregation. (James 5:14).

BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS

"An overseer then must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping children under control with all dignity ... and not a new convert, he must have a good reputation with those outside the church so he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." (I Tim 3:2-7).

"If a man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion ... above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word ... that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict." (Titus 1:6-9).

SCRIPTURE	INTERPRETATION
1. Above Reproach	Elders must lead by example and demonstrate a life style free of patterns of sin and of unrepented sin.
2. Husband of One Wife	Elders, if married, must be devoted spouses.*
3. Temperate	Elders must be self-controlled, enslaved to nothing, free from excesses.
4. Prudent	Elders must be sober, sensible, wise, balanced in judgment, not given to quick, superficial decisions based on immature thinking.
5. Respectable	Elders must demonstrate a well ordered life and honorable behavior.
6. Hospitable	Elders must be unselfish with their personal resources. They must be willing to share blessings with others.
7. Able to Teach	Elders must be able to communicate the truth of God and exhort sound doctrine in a non-argumentative way. (II Tim 4:2, 2:24).
8. Not Addicted to Wine	Elders must be free from addictions, and must be willing to limit their liberty for the sake of others.
9. Not Pugnacious	Elders must be gentle, patient and able to exercise self control in difficult situations.
10. Uncontentious	Elders must not be given to quarreling or selfish argumentation.
11. Free From the Love of Money	Elders must not be stingy, greedy or out for sordid gain. They should not be preoccupied with amassing material things, but rather should be models of giving.
12. Manage Own Household	Elders must manage their own household well, keeping their children, if any, under control with all dignity.
13. Not a New Convert	Elders must not be new believers. They must have been Christians long enough to demonstrate the reality of their conversion, the depth of their spirituality, and their spiritual leadership.
14. Good Reputation with Outsiders	Elders must be well respected by unbelievers, and must be free from hypocrisy.
15. Not Self-Willed	Elders must not be stubborn, prone to force opinions on others or abuse authority. They must be servants.
16. Not Quick Tempered	Elders must be able to exercise self-control and patience in difficult situations.
17. Loves What is Good	Elders must desire the will of God in every decision.
18. Just	Elders must desire to be fair and impartial. Their judgments must be based on Scriptural principles.

19. Devout Elders must be devoted followers of Christ seeking to be conformed to His image. They must be committed to prayer, worship, the study of Scripture and the guarding of their own spiritual walk. (Acts 20:28).
20. Holding Fast the Faithful Word Elders must be stable in the faith, obedient to the Word of God, continually seeking to be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

*It is recognized that interpretive differences exist among Bible-believing Christians regarding the eligibility of women to be elders. Persons who hold differing views on this subject are all welcome and eligible for membership in this church.

APPENDIX D: BIBLICAL ROLE AND QUALIFICATIONS OF DEACONS

THE BIBLICAL ROLE OF DEACONS

"And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, >It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. But select from among you brethren, seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and wisdom, who we may put in charge of this task." (Acts 6:2-3)

Deacons are to serve under the direction of elders, undertaking those areas of service necessary for the church's functioning that would otherwise prohibit the elders and other leaders (pastoral staff) from performing their Biblical responsibilities. No specific, on-going roles are mentioned in Scripture, probably because service needs change, and so the role of deacons should be flexible.

While there is equality in value between elders, deacons, and in fact, all members of the body, Scripture indicates that elders, as overseers, are entrusted with the final authority within the local church.

QUALIFICATIONS OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSES*

"Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women [wives] must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be husbands of only one wife and good managers of their children and their households." (I Tim 3:8-12)

SCRIPTURE	INTERPRETATION
1. Individuals of Dignity	Deacons must be mature, of sound mind and character, yielded to the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3).
2. Not Double-Tongued	Deacons must demonstrate verbal consistency. They must not be prone to saying one thing to one person and something else to another.
3. Not Addicted to Wine	Deacons must be free from addictions, and must be willing to limit their liberty for the sake of others.
4. Not Fond of Sordid Gain	Deacons must be purely motivated in their service.
5. Holding to the Mystery of Faith with a Clear Conscience	Deacons must have a sound knowledge of Christian truths and a lifestyle in accord with them. They must not easily be swayed from the truth.
6. Beyond Reproach	Deacons must display a lifestyle free from on-going patterns of Scriptural disobedience.
7. First Tested	Deacons must have proven over time that they are faithful and that their spiritual walk is credible.
8. Their Spouses Must be Faithful, Dignified, Not Malicious Gossips	Deacons must have spouses that are trustworthy, worthy of respect, self controlled, and not gossipers. If the spouse is not a believer, the deacon must be earnestly striving for the spouse's conversion.
9. The Husband of One Wife	Deacons, if married, must be devoted spouses.*

10. Manage Household Well

Deacons must manage their own household well, keeping children, if any, under control with all dignity.

*I Timothy 3:11 and Romans 16:1 indicate the existence of deaconesses. It is presumed that they would have the same qualifications and roles as deacons, and the qualification "the husband of one wife" would become "the wife of one husband."