

# THE CONSTITUTION OF YORK EVANGELICAL CHURCH

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The main purposes for which this constitution has been drawn up are:

- to set down in clear and ordered form our beliefs, gathered from Scripture, concerning the faith and conduct of the church;
- to regulate procedure in other matters which arise in the course of church life, which are not dealt with explicitly in the Scriptures, but are to be ordered in the light of the general rules of the Word of God;
- to provide a practical guide to the privileges and responsibilities of church membership.

## 2 THE CHURCH AND THE CHRISTIAN

### 2.1 Definition of the Church

**The universal church** of the Lord Jesus Christ consists of those of every race, every land and every generation, who are chosen by God the Father, redeemed by Christ's death and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

**The local church** is a visible manifestation, in a particular locality, of the universal church. It comprises a company of Christians who meet together to worship God; to hear His Word; to observe the ordinances for believers of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; to minister to one another for mutual edification; to pray together; to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world; and to grow into a holy people unto the Lord.

## 2.2 Definition of a Christian

A Christian is one who, having been born again of the Holy Spirit, has repented of his sin; received Jesus Christ, by faith, as Lord and Saviour; and has been made a child of God.

## 3 CHURCH DOCTRINE

Historically our doctrinal convictions are substantially reflected in such documents as **The Westminster Confession** and **The Baptist Confession of 1689** though any doctrinal controversies are to be settled by Scripture alone. The doctrinal basis of faith held to by York Evangelical Church is as follows.

### 3.1 The Holy Scriptures

The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, as the inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God, and as the sole, supreme, and all-sufficient authority in every matter of Christian faith and practice.

### 3.2 The Trinity

One living and true God, sovereign in creation, providence and redemption, subsisting in three Persons - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - the same in substance, and equal in power and glory.

### 3.3 The Lord Jesus Christ

The eternal sonship and essential, absolute, and eternal Deity, and true and sinless humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ; His virgin birth, death, and burial; His physical resurrection and ascension into heaven, and His coming again in power and glory.

### 3.4 The Holy Spirit

The Personality and deity of the Holy Spirit, through Whom the sinner is born again to saving repentance and faith, and by Whom the saints are sanctified through the truth.

### 3.5 The Fall of Man

The fall of mankind in Adam, by which they have totally lost their original righteousness and holiness, and have come under the righteous condemnation of God.

### 3.6 Unconditional Election

The personal and unconditional election in Christ of a multitude which no man can number unto everlasting salvation, out of God's pure grace and love, without regard to any foresight of faith or good works in them.

### 3.7 Particular Redemption

The personal and eternal redemption from all sin and penal consequences thereof, of all God's elect, by the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### 3.8 The Free Offer of the Gospel

The free offer of the Gospel to all men, and the effectual calling of the elect by the irresistible grace of God.

### 3.9 Justification

The justification of sinners by faith alone, through the atoning death and resurrection and imputed righteousness of Christ.

### 3.10 Final Perseverance

The final perseverance in the state of grace of all those who have been elected by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and regenerated by the Holy Spirit, so that they shall never perish, but have eternal life.

## 4 CHURCH GOVERNMENT

### 4.1 Principles

The chief principles of church government are as follows.

- The sole Governor of the Church is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, as the Head of the Body.
- The one infallible means by which He governs His Church is the Word of God, the Bible.
- The Head of the Church has ordered that oversight and administration of the local church is to be by elders and deacons.

## 4.2 Elders

- Function. The function of elders is three-fold:
  - a) **To govern the local church.** Authority in every aspect of church life is committed to them, and no decision or policy may be implemented which does not meet with their approval. (1 Thess 5:12-13; 1 Tim 5:17; Heb 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2-5; Acts 16:4.)
  - b) **To shepherd the flock.** They are to guard the local church from error and false teaching, and to feed and strengthen the members with the Word of God, caring for each individual soul. (Acts 20:28-30; Eph 4:11; Heb 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2-5; James 5:14.)
  - c) **To teach the Word of God.** Some amongst the elders may have a gift for preaching; all, however, must be able to teach, and must fully understand and agree to the doctrinal basis and rules of church practice. (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9; 1 Tim 5:17.)
- Qualifications. The qualifications for elders are laid down in detail in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, from which passages it is plain that no woman may hold this office.
- Number. The number of elders shall be determined by the availability of men with the scriptural qualifications for the office, and the spiritual and pastoral requirements of the church. Wherever the word 'elders' occurs the possibility of the singular 'elder' is to be recognised. If at any time there should be no elder in the church, then additional responsibility will rest upon the deacons to ensure the correct running of church affairs. If it is felt appropriate, assistance may be sought from the eldership of a like-minded church with which York Evangelical Church is in fellowship.
- Appointment. A nomination for the eldership may be made at any time by the existing elders themselves, or alternatively any church member may make a nomination to the existing elders. A prospective elder shall normally have been in membership for at least a year.

If a nomination meets with the elders' approval it shall be put to the church members. An appropriate interval shall elapse during which the members are to seek the Lord's face upon the matter, and may raise in confidence with the existing elders any biblical objections to the brother's fitness which they believe arise.

If, at the end of this interval, no such objections stand, the brother will be deemed to have been accepted by the church and will formally be set aside for the work of an elder on a convenient Lord's Day as soon as possible. Elders shall serve for life, unless they have to be removed from office for any serious reason.

- Removal. The reasons for which an elder shall be removed from office are: persistent neglect of duty; behaviour which brings the Name and cause of Christ into disrepute; or failure to maintain wholehearted agreement with the doctrinal basis. If complaints, made to the other elders, are valid, then the other elders shall take disciplinary action and inform the church. If it becomes evident that the age or infirmity of an elder renders him incapable of fulfilling his office, the other elders shall ask him to retire.
- The Minister or Pastor. The minister or pastor shall be recognised as the presiding elder and (wherever possible) shall be set aside full-time to labour in prayer and the ministry of the Word. His appointment shall be as for the other elders, except that he may be called to office from another church, having first visited and preached in the church, and his nomination will be positively confirmed at a members' meeting prior to his call. If he should wish to resign, he shall give at least three months written notice to the church, though at the discretion of the other elders this period of notice may be waived. If the church should wish him to resign (for reasons set out respecting the removal of elders) they shall give him at least six months written notice.

The pastor's salary shall be determined by the elders and deacons together, and shall be reviewed at least annually. In the event of his death whilst in office, the church shall provide for the immediate maintenance of the pastor's wife and family, by at least the payment of his salary for the first three months after his death.

### 4.3 Deacons

- Function. The function of deacons is to attend to the material and financial affairs of the church, allowing the elders to concentrate on the duties of their own office. More specifically, the deacons' duties include: the secretarial work of the church; the collection and distribution of money; caring for the poor and needy by practical help; and the care, preparation and maintenance of all property and materials connected with the church.

From the body of deacons, the elders shall appoint one to be secretary and one to be treasurer.

- Qualifications. The qualifications for deacons are laid down in detail in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, with which compare Acts 6:1-7, from which passages it is plain that no woman may hold this office.
- Number. The number of deacons shall be determined by the availability of men having the scriptural qualifications for the office, and the practical and administrative requirements of the church.
- Appointment. The detailed procedure for appointment will be the same as for the appointment of elders, with only those men being put to the church for this office of whom the elders approve.
- Removal. This will be the same as with elders.

### 4.4 Meetings of Church Officers

The elders should meet as often as possible for prayer, study of the Word and discussion. The deacons should meet as and when necessary, when the minister or another elder would ordinarily be present and act as chairman. The elders and deacons should also meet together as and when necessary for prayer, study and discussion.

### 4.5 Meetings of Church Members

Meetings for all members of the church shall be held at least quarterly with the purpose of giving the elders and deacons an opportunity to report on their work; giving members of the church an opportunity to discuss such items as are set on the agenda and to hear reports on the different activities of the church; and to receive recommendations from the elders for the appointment of elders and deacons and for the admission of members. Each members' meeting will include a financial statement.

Due notice shall be given of any members' meeting by the circulation of an agenda to all members. A quorum shall consist of half the total membership.

As soon as possible after the end of each calendar year, the annual accounts shall be presented to church members for approval and adoption.

All proceedings at members' meetings shall be confidential and may not be discussed outside the membership.

## 5 CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

A distinction is maintained between **the members** (those formally examined and enrolled) and **the congregation** (the wider gathering of those who come for worship and fellowship). Believers attending regularly for worship shall be exhorted by the elders to consider membership. The list of members shall be reviewed annually by the elders.

### 5.1 Admittance

All applications for membership shall be made to the elders, who shall interview the applicants and forward to a members' meeting the names of those recommended for membership. In the absence of any valid objection the applicants shall be received into membership. The elders shall only recommend those who:

- profess both repentance of sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ;
- show in their lives consistent evidence that their profession is a real work of God's grace;
- accept the basis of faith of the church;
- accept the privileges, responsibilities and discipline of membership as set out below.

It is not essential that those who join the church must fully understand all the depths of the doctrines set out in the basis of faith, for it is within the life of the local church that God's children grow in grace and knowledge of the Saviour. A deeper understanding of these matters is, however, required of elders and deacons.

## 5.2 Privileges

The privileges of membership include:

- the personal and pastoral care of the elders;
- the love and concern of the fellow members;
- the participation in members' meetings;
- the right to nominate elders and deacons.

## 5.3 Responsibilities

The responsibilities of membership include:

- regular attendance at the Sunday services and at meetings for Bible study and prayer;
- eagerness to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the fellowship, refraining from all conduct and conversation which might do harm to the fellowship, doing all possible to promote its spiritual well-being, and seeking at all times to obey our Lord's command to love one another;
- service in the Lord's work in the local church, according to the gifts and talents received;
- acceptance of the discipline of the church, in accordance with the Word of God;
- acceptance of the office of Pastor; support of the pastor by love, prayer and the meeting of his material needs; a sincere desire to hear God speaking through the preaching of the Word and, by God's grace, willingness to obey that Word;
- a serious, prayerful and sacrificial share in meeting the financial requirements of the church in accordance with the resources God has given by His providence;
- a readiness to witness to Christ, endeavouring to live a consistent Christian life in the world adorning the Gospel of our God and Saviour.

## 5.4 Student Membership

Ordinarily, membership is a unique commitment to a local church, involving a full share of responsibility for church decisions and without any limit to the period of membership. However, the church admits Student Members who:

- are pursuing a course of study in the York area and are members only for the duration of this course;
- may return home for extended periods between terms of study and may be members of their home church too;
- are welcome at members' meetings but are not reckoned as members for the few purposes requiring a specified proportion of the membership;
- in all other respects take a full part as members of the church.

## 6 CHURCH DISCIPLINE

All disciplinary action, however undesirable or extreme, must be exercised in a spirit of love and humility, along with an earnest desire to maintain the honour of Christ's Name and the purity of His church. Basic to all discipline is self-discipline, as the Holy Spirit applies God's Word to individual lives and convicts of the need for repentance, reformation and holiness.

### 6.1 Grounds

The grounds for church discipline are four-fold:

- a persistent rejection of any part of the doctrinal basis;
- conduct which is a serious and continued inconsistency with a profession of Christ;
- behaviour which will result in creating divisions, party spirit or strife in the life of the church;
- persistent failure to fulfil the responsibilities of membership without good reason.

## 6.2 Manner

Discipline is exercised in three main ways:

- **By the Word applied personally.** Where a member is not heeding the preached Word, it shall be pointed out to him in private by the elders, and the erring one exhorted to obey the Scriptures.
- **By suspension of membership.** If the private ministry of the elders is unheeded membership shall be suspended. A suspended member may not attend any members' meeting. Suspension is accompanied by the continued ministry of the elders with the longing for the restoration of the member.
- **By withdrawal of membership.** If the offender remains unrepentant and there is no change of heart, then the elders shall report the matter at a members' meeting where suitable disciplinary action will be announced. Even if a person's name has to be removed from the membership list, the church should continue to pray for his repentance and restoration.

## 7 CHURCH ORDINANCES

The Lord Jesus Christ, when He was on earth, commanded that believers should observe two ordinances – namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

### 7.1 Baptism

By immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, upon profession of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, baptism symbolises the believer's union with the Lord Jesus Christ in His death, burial and resurrection, and also union with fellow believers in the Body of Christ. Baptism does not itself convey regenerating grace.

Any unbaptised Christian, whether or not a member, may apply to the elders for baptism at any time. The elders shall strongly exhort prospective members to be baptised (from which it follows that elders themselves must be baptised men, as must deacons), but baptism is not a condition of membership, nor is it a condition of participation in the Lord's Supper.

## 7.2 The Lord's Supper

By the breaking and eating of bread and the pouring and drinking of wine the Lord's supper is a memorial of our Saviour's death, until He comes again in glory at the end of the age. The Lord's Supper is not a sacrifice for sin, and does not involve any change in the substance of the bread and wine; Christ is present at the supper through the person of the Holy Spirit, apprehended by faith alone.

Any Christian, whether or not a member, may participate in the Lord's Supper which shall be observed at frequent intervals. Participants who show no evidence of the new birth shall be privately warned against further participation. The elders shall strongly exhort members to participate in the Lord's Supper whenever possible.

## 8 CHURCH AFFAIRS

### 8.1 Relations with other churches

The elders shall encourage and strengthen biblical unity and fellowship with other local churches. However, the church can have no fellowship with those who deny the fundamentals of the faith set out in the doctrinal basis.

Individual members must ensure that their personal affiliations and activities are consistent with the responsibilities of membership and do not compromise the testimony or doctrinal position of the church.

### 8.2 Evangelism and missionary work

As a consistent priority the elders shall ensure that the Lord's command to preach the Gospel locally and further afield to all the world is kept before the church. Consequently evangelism and missionary labour shall be actively pursued by prayer, sacrificial giving and corporate involvement. A minimum of 10% of the general offering should be set aside for such work.

### 8.3 Sectional activities, speakers and materials

All the leaders of activities within the church must be approved by the elders, as must all who serve in any formal capacity within the church. Reports shall be made on these activities at members' meetings from time to time.

Similarly, all speakers invited to address meetings of or in connection with the church, all teaching materials used in the church, and all literature distributed by or through the church must have the approval of the elders.

#### 8.4 Students

Any Christian friends who come to York as students shall be warmly received into the fellowship, offered hospitality as and when possible, and encouraged to make a settled home in the church as Student Members.

#### 8.5 Constitution

Any amendment or addition to this constitution must have the approval of the elders and the support of at least 80% of the total membership.