



THE CHESAPEAKE CHURCH BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER

**Amended and approved
February 21, 2023**

Questions and comments should be submitted
by e-mail to elders@chesapeakechurch.org

*(Any referenced attachments are not part of this
document and are provided for clarification only)*

Table of Contents

CHESAPEAKE CHURCH STATEMENT OF FAITH 4

PREFACE TO THE BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER 6

I. The King and Head of the Church 6

II. Preliminary Principles 7

III. The Constitution Defined 8

PART I – THE FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT 9

Chapter 1 – Church Government 9

Chapter 2 – The Visible Church Defined 9

Chapter 3 – The Nature and Extent of Church Power 10

Chapter 4 – The Particular Church 10

Chapter 5 – Church Members 11

Chapter 6 – Church Officers – General Classification 12

Chapter 7 – The Elder 12

Chapter 8 – The Deacon 13

Chapter 9 – The Church Session..... 14

Chapter 10 – Jurisdiction of The Session..... 15

Chapter 11 – Ecclesiastical Commissions 16

Chapter 12 – Ordination 17

Chapter 13 – Candidates for The Gospel Ministry 18

Chapter 14 –Pastoral Positions 19

Chapter 15 – The Qualification and Election of Senior & Associate Pastors 20

Chapter 16 – The Ordination of Pastors 22

Chapter 17 – The Dissolution of Pastoral Relations and the Procedure for Honorable Retirement 25

<u>Chapter 18 – Election, Ordination, and Installation of Elders</u>	26
<u>Chapter 19 – Congregational Meetings</u>	29
<u>Chapter 20 – Amending the Constitution of the Church</u>	29
<u>PART II - WORSHIP, THE SACRAMENTS, AND CEREMONIES</u>	31
<u>Chapter 21 – The Preaching of the Word</u>	31
<u>Chapter 22 – The Worship of God By Offerings</u>	32
<u>Chapter 23 – The Administration of Baptism</u>	32
<u>Chapter 24 – The Administration of the Communion</u>	36
<u>Chapter 25 – Biblical Marriage</u>	37
<u>Chapter 26 – Funerals and Memorial Services</u>	38
<u>PART III – THE DISCIPLINE OF THE CHURCH</u>	39
<u>Chapter 27 – Discipline: Its Nature, Subject and Ends</u>	39
<u>Chapter 28 – Disciplining of Non-Communing Members</u>	41
<u>Chapter 29 – Offenses</u>	42
<u>Chapter 30 – Church Censures</u>	42
<u>Chapter 31 – The Parties in Cases of Process</u>	43
<u>Appendices</u>	45

CHESAPEAKE CHURCH

STATEMENT OF FAITH

The sole basis of our belief is the Bible in its original text, which is uniquely inspired by God, without error, and the final authority on all matters. As the Bible teaches, there is one God, eternally existing in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – each possessing all the attributes of Deity.

The Son, Jesus Christ, lived a sinless life on earth and voluntarily paid for our sin by dying on the cross as our substitute. By His sacrifice, Jesus accomplishes salvation for all who receive grace by trusting in Him alone. Jesus died, rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, where He exists as the only mediator between God and man. Jesus will return to earth to consummate history.

- We believe unequivocally in the authority of the Holy Scriptures in all matters pertaining to faith, doctrine and practice.
- We believe in the triune Godhead.
- We believe that God, the Father, is the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe.
- We believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior of the world, and the sole mediator between God and man.
- We believe in the deity and humanity of Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the father, in His present rule as Head of the Church, and in His personal return in power and glory.
- We believe Jesus' resurrection to be the focal point of all history, and the principal reality in the lives of all believers.
- We believe in the imminent return of Christ.
- We believe in the Holy Spirit, in His past and present regenerative role in the lives of all believers in Christ. The Holy Spirit dwells within us and enables us to live a godly life.

- We believe that man is justified by God's grace through faith alone in the finished work that was accomplished by Christ at Calvary.
- We believe that salvation is available to all people through repentance and faith in Christ. Salvation and cleansing from sin is available only through repentance and faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ.
- We believe the church is Christ's body of believers on earth. We believe that the Spirit of God inhabits His church.
- We believe God has ordained Baptism and Communion as the only two sacraments for His church.
- We believe that all men will be resurrected to receive either eternal reward in heaven or eternal punishment in hell.
- We believe that all followers of Christ should endeavor to demonstrate moral purity and exemplary behavior in every facet of their lives, in accordance with the Scriptures.
- We believe in the institution of marriage as one man and one woman as it is described in the Bible
- We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in Jesus Christ, with equality across racial, gender and class differences.

PREFACE TO THE BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER

I. THE KING AND HEAD OF THE CHURCH

Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders the government rests, whose name is called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace; of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end; He will reign on David's throne, and over His kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever (*Isaiah 9:6-7*); having all power given to Him in heaven and on earth by the Father, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come; and God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way (*Ephesians 1:20-23*); He, who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe, received gifts for His Church, and gave all offices necessary for the edification of His Church and the perfecting of His believers (*Ephesians 4:10-13*).

Jesus, the Mediator, the sole Priest, Prophet, King, Savior, and Head of the Church, contains in Himself, by way of eminence, all the offices in His Church, and has many of their names attributed to Him in the Scriptures. He is Apostle, Teacher, Pastor, Minister, Bishop and the only Lawgiver in Zion.

It belongs to His Majesty from His throne of glory to rule and teach the Church through His Word and Spirit by the ministry of men and women; thus exercising His own authority and enforcing His own laws, for the edification and establishment of His Kingdom.

Christ, as King, has given to His Church officers, oracles and ordinances; and especially has He ordained His system of doctrine, government, discipline and worship, all of which are either expressly set down in Scripture, or may be necessarily inferred from Scripture; and to which things He commands that nothing will be added, and from them nothing will be taken away.

Since the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven, He is present with the Church by His Word and Spirit, and the benefits of all His offices are effectually applied by the Holy Spirit.

II. PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES

Chesapeake Church, in setting forth the form of government founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God, reiterates the following great principles which have governed the formation of the plan:

1. God alone is Lord of the conscience and has left it free from any doctrines or commandments of men (a) which are in any respect contrary to the Word of God, or (b) which, in regard to matters of faith and worship, are not governed by the Word of God. Therefore, the rights of private judgment in all matters that respect religion are universal and inalienable. No religious constitution should be supported by the civil power further than may be necessary for protection and security equal and common to all others.

2. In perfect consistency with the above principle, every Christian Church is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government which Christ has appointed. In the exercise of this right it may, notwithstanding, err in making the terms of communion either too lax or too narrow; yet even in this case, it does not infringe upon the liberty or the rights of others, but only makes an improper use of its own.

3. Our blessed Savior, for the edification of the visible Church, which is His body, has appointed officers not only to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments, but also to exercise discipline for the preservation both of truth and duty. It is incumbent upon these officers and upon the whole Church in whose name they act, to censure or cast out the erroneous and scandalous, observing in all cases the rules contained in the Word of God.

4. Godliness is founded on truth. A test of truth is its power to promote holiness according to our Savior's rule, "By their fruit you will recognize them" (*Matthew 7:20*). No opinion can be more harmful than that which brings truth and falsehood upon the same level. On the contrary, there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise, it would be of no consequence either to discover truth or to embrace it.

5. While, under the conviction of the above principle, it is necessary to make effective provision that all who are admitted as teachers be sound in the faith, there are truths and forms with respect to which people of good character and principles may differ. In all these it is the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual patience and self-control towards each other.

6. Though the character, qualifications and authority of church officers are laid down in the Holy Scriptures, as well as the proper method of officer installation, the power to affirm persons to the exercise of authority in any particular church resides in that church.

7. All church power, whether exercised by the body in general, or the elders, is only ministerial and declarative since the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice. No church governing body may make laws to bind the conscience. All church courts may err through human frailty, yet it rests upon them to uphold the laws of Scripture though this obligation may be lodged with fallible people.

8. If the preceding Scriptural principles are steadfastly adhered to, the vigor and strictness of disciplines will contribute to the glory and well-being of the Church. Since ecclesiastical discipline derives its force only from the power and authority of Christ, the great Head of the Church Universal, it must be purely moral and spiritual in its nature.

9. The purpose of the local church, founded in the Great Commission (*Matthew 28:19-20*), is to bring men and women to a saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel message, once accepted, is not to be retained by believers but shared, making Christ's message of grace available to all. The Church's task is to glorify God, grow in the Word, serve the needy, show love to all, and equip believers to proclaim and exhibit to others the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

III. THE CONSTITUTION DEFINED

The Constitution of Chesapeake Church is subject to and subordinate to the inerrant Word Of God as found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and consists of doctrinal standards set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, together with the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, and the *Book of Church Order*, comprising the Form of Government, and the Rules of Discipline all as adopted by the Church.

Chesapeake Church is an independent Presbyterian church. Accordingly, Chesapeake Church takes exception with Chapter XXI:VIII of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. All functions of synods and councils described in that chapter rest wholly with the local church Session.

PART I The Form of Church Government

CHAPTER 1.

Church Government.

1-1. The Scriptural form of church government, which is Presbyterian, or representative, is comprehended under five heads: a. The church; b. Its members; c. Its officers; d. Its courts; e. Its orders.

1-2. The Church which the Lord Jesus Christ has erected in this world for the gathering and perfecting of believers is His visible kingdom of grace, and is one and the same in all ages.

1-3. The members of this visible Church are all those persons in every nation, together with their children, who make profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and promise submission to His laws.

1-4. The officers of the church, by whom all its powers are administered, are, according to the Scriptures, affirmed and elected elders, and deacons. The functions of the office of deacon are fulfilled by Pastors, Directors, and Ministry Leaders (*see BOCO 8-1*).

1-5. Ecclesiastical jurisdiction is not a several, but a joint power, to be exercised by elders in the Session. The Session has jurisdiction over Chesapeake Church, but it sustains such mutual relations as to realize the idea of the unity of the universal Church (*see BOCO 3-2*).

1-6. The ordination of officers is done by the Session (*see BOCO 19-4*).

1-7. We believe this Scriptural doctrine of biblical Presbyterianism is necessary to the perfection of the order of the visible Church, but is not essential to its existence.

CHAPTER 2.

The Visible Church Defined.

2-1. The visible Church before the law, under the law, and now under the Gospel, is one and the same and consists of all those who make profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, together with their children.

2-2. This visible unity of the body of Christ, though obscured, is not destroyed by its division into different local churches and denominations of professing Christians; but all of these which maintain the Word and Sacraments in their fundamental integrity are to be recognized as true branches of the Church of Jesus Christ.

2-3. It is according to Scriptural example that the Church should be divided into many individual churches.

CHAPTER 3.

The Nature and Extent of Church Power.

3-1. The power which Christ has committed to His Church rests in the whole body, the rulers and those ruled, constituting it a spiritual commonwealth. This power, as exercised by the people, extends to the affirmation and election of those officers whom He has appointed in His Church.

3-2. Ecclesiastical power, which is wholly spiritual, is twofold. The officers exercise it sometimes severally, as in preaching the Gospel, administering the Sacraments, reproofing the erring, visiting the sick, and comforting the afflicted, which is the power of order; and they exercise it sometimes jointly in Church courts, after the form of judgment, which is the power of jurisdiction.

3-3. The sole functions of the Church, as a kingdom and government distinct from the civil commonwealth, are to proclaim, to administer, and to enforce the law of Christ revealed in the Scriptures.

3-4. The power of the Church is exclusively spiritual; that of the State includes the exercise of force. The constitution of the Church derives from divine revelation; the constitution of the State must be determined by human reason and the course of providential events. The Church has no right to construct or modify a government for the State, and the State has no right to frame a creed or polity for the Church. They are as planets moving in concentric orbits: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (*Matthew 22:21*).

3-5. The Church, with its ordinances, officers and court, is the agency which Christ has ordained for the edification and government of His people, for the propagation of the faith, and for the evangelization of the world.

3-6. The exercise of ecclesiastical power, whether joint or several, has the divine sanction when in conformity with the statutes enacted by Christ, the Lawgiver, and when put forth by courts or by officers appointed by His Word.

CHAPTER 4.

The Particular Church.

4-1. A particular church consists of a number of professing Christians, with their children, associated together for divine worship and godly living, agreeable to the Scriptures, and submitting to the lawful government of Christ's kingdom.

4-2. Its officers are its elders and deacons (*see BOCO Chapter 9 and 8*, respectively).

4-3. Its jurisdiction, being a joint power, is lodged in the congregationally elected and affirmed elders.

4-4. The ordinances established by Christ, the Head, in His Church are prayer; singing praises; reading, expounding and preaching the Word of God; administering the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; public fasting and thanksgiving; making offerings for the relief of the

poor and for other worthy uses; exercising discipline; the taking of solemn vows; and the ordination to sacred office.

4-5. When the church is without a pastor, the church should be convened by the Session on the Lord's Day, and at other suitable times, for prayer, praise, the presenting and expounding of the Holy Scriptures, and exhortation, or the reading of a sermon of an approved minister. In like manner, Christians who have been placed by God in distant regions should strive to meet regularly for the worship of God.

CHAPTER 5.

Church Members.

5-1. When we talk about being a part of a church, there are two types of membership: *Positional Membership & Participating Membership.*

First, when you become a believer, when you truly accept Jesus as the savior of your soul and the leader of your life – you become a member of the Body of Christ, the church of all believers. That is known as *Positional Membership.* You are now *positioned* as a member in the entire Body of Christ.

Then, when you commit to actively live out God's will for your life in a specific church that is known as *Participating Membership.*

The children of believers are, through the covenant and by right of birth, non-communing members of the church. Therefore, they are entitled to Baptism and to the pastoral oversight, instruction and government of the church. They are to be taught to love God, and to obey and serve the Lord Jesus Christ, with a view to their embracing Christ and thus possessing personally all benefits of the covenant.

5-2. Communing non-members are those who have made a profession of faith in Christ, have been baptized, and have been admitted by the Session to the Lord's Table. This includes children of members, who have been admitted to the Lord's Supper but have not completed the formal Chesapeake Church membership process.

5-3. All baptized persons are entitled to the watchful care, instruction and government of the church, even though they are adults and have made no profession of their faith in Christ.

5-4. Communing members, who are only those who have made a profession of faith in Christ, have been baptized, have been admitted by the Session to the Lord's Table and have completed the formal Chesapeake Church membership process, are entitled to all the rights and privileges of the church.

CHAPTER 6.

Church Officers-General Classification.

6-1. Under the New Testament, our Lord at first collected His people out of different nations and united them to the household of faith by the ministry of extraordinary officers who received extraordinary gifts of the Spirit and who were agents by whom God completed His revelation to His Church. Such officers and gifts related to new revelation have no successors, since God completed His revelation at the conclusion of the Apostolic Age.

6-2. The ordinary and perpetual classes of office in the Church are elders and deacons. The elders jointly have the responsibility for government and spiritual oversight of the church, including teaching.

6-3. No one who holds office in the church ought to usurp authority, or receive any official title of spiritual preeminence, except those fulfilling the roles prescribed in Scripture.

CHAPTER 7.

The Elder.

7-1. This office is one of dignity and usefulness, and it is the duty of an elder to be grave and prudent, an example to the flock, and to govern well in the house and Kingdom of Christ. As it is his duty to be spiritually fruitful, dignified, and prudent, an example to the flock, and to govern well in the house and Kingdom of Christ, he is termed *presbyter* or *elder*. As he expounds the Word, and by sound doctrine both exhorts and convinces the congregation, he is termed *teacher*. Such titles do not indicate different grades of office, but all describe one and the same office. At Chesapeake Church we believe the Bible teaches this office is designated to men only.

7-2. He that fills this office will meet the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. He should possess a competency of human learning and be above reproach, sound in the faith, and able to teach. He should exhibit a seriousness and holiness of life becoming the Gospel. He should rule his own house well and should have a good reputation among those that are outside the church.

7-3. It belongs to the office of elder, both severally and jointly, to watch diligently over the flock committed to their charge, that no corruption of doctrine or of morals be able to enter. They must exercise government and discipline and take oversight not only of the spiritual interests of the particular church, but also oversight of the physical church. As such, elected elders shall function as the trustees of Chesapeake Church.

7-4. Their interests must also reside with the church generally when called to office. As such, they should visit the people at their homes, especially the sick. They should instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourning, nourish and guard the children of the church. They should set a worthy example to the flock entrusted to their care by their zeal to evangelize those far from God and make disciples. All those duties which private Christians are bound to discharge by the law of love are especially incumbent upon them by divine vocation and are to be discharged as official duties. They should pray with and for the people, being careful and diligent in seeking the fruit of the preached Word among the flock.

7-5. The government of the church is by officers gifted to represent Christ, and the right of God's people to recognize by election to office those so gifted is inalienable. Therefore, no man can be placed over a church in the office of elder without the consent of that church.

7-6. Upon those whom God calls to bear office in His Church He bestows suitable gifts for the discharge of their various duties. And it is indispensable that, besides possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, natural and acquired, everyone admitted to the office of elder should be sound in the faith and live a life of godliness. Therefore, every candidate for the office of elder is to be approved by the Session by which he is to be ordained.

CHAPTER 8.

Deacons.

8-1. At Chesapeake Church we believe the Bible teaches that role of deacon is not an elected office, but rather that of a called and ordered servant leader. At Chesapeake Church the biblical position of deacon is fulfilled within the body by those who serve in both volunteer and staff capacities of the church. Pastors, Directors, and Ministry Leaders will in all ways demonstrate the Biblical qualifications of deacon as set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus.

The role is one of leadership, sympathy, and service, after the example of the Lord Jesus, expressing the communion of believers, especially in their helping one another in time of need.

8-2. It is the duty of these servant leaders to minister and lead others in ministry, caring for those who are in need, the sick, the friendless, and any who may be in distress. It is their duty also to devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people, and to distribute these gifts for the glory of God. They will have the operational care of the property of the congregation, both real and personal, and will keep in proper repair the church edifice and other buildings belonging to the congregation. In matters of special importance affecting the property of the church, they cannot take final action without the approval of the Session and consent of the congregation.

In the discharge of their duties, Chesapeake Church staff and ministry leaders are under the supervision of assigned pastors, subject to the approval, oversight, and delegated authority of the Session.

8-3. It is often expedient that the church should select and appoint godly men and women of the congregation to assist the staff in the execution of their duties, including the care of the people, property, and functional ministry of the church. This also includes caring for the sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any distress or need. Chesapeake Church recognizes these members as subordinate staff members and volunteer service roles. These assistants to those fulfilling the functions of deacon are not officers of the church and, as such, are not subjects for ordination.

CHAPTER 9.

The Church Session.

9-1. The church Session consists of the elected and affirmed elders of the church. All pastors, although not members of the Session, may be invited to attend and participate in discussion but will not hold a vote on any matter before the Session.

9-2. The Session will elect its moderator from among the elders. In the moderator's absence, if any emergency arises requiring immediate action, the Session may elect one of its members to preside. The Session, by a majority vote of its members, may fix its own quorum, provided that it is not smaller than a majority of elders.

9-3. The Session will also elect a clerk from among the elders. The clerk is responsible for the proceedings and all matters of formal record.

9-4. The church Session is charged with maintaining the spiritual and physical governance of the church, for which purpose it has power:

- to adopt the written doctrine of the Christian faith as practiced and observed, as established in the constitution (*see Preface at III*).
- to inquire into the knowledge, principles and Christian conduct of the church members under its care; to censure those found delinquent; to see that parents do not neglect to present their children for Baptism; to receive members into the communion of the church; to remove them for just cause; to grant letters of dismissal to other churches, which when given to parents, will always include the names of their non-communing baptized children;
- to examine, ordain, and install elders on their election and affirmation by the church, and to require these officers to devote themselves to their work;
- to examine, ordain, and install pastors and directors determined necessary for the work of ministry;
- to examine the records of the proceedings of the Chesapeake Church staff and ministry leaders;
- to approve and adopt the budget;
- to approve actions affecting church property including the ability to buy, sell, or mortgage property for the church, accept and execute deeds, and hold titles (in accordance with BOCO 8-2);
- to call congregational meetings when necessary;
- to establish, ensure, and provide oversight of Scriptural integrity in all matters, including teaching of adults and children, individual ministry groups, and small groups;
- to promote world missions;
- to promote obedience to the Great Commission in its totality at home and abroad;
- to receive offerings and direct their proper use in the building of God's Kingdom;
- to exercise authority over the time and place of the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments, over all other religious services, over the music in the services, and over the uses to which the church building and associated properties may be put;
- to assemble the people for worship when there is no minister;
- to determine the best measures for promoting the spiritual interests of the church and congregation;
- to observe and carry out the lawful injunctions of the church court.

The Session may, at its discretion, delegate day-to-day oversight and execution over the preceding to Chesapeake Church pastoral staff (through the Senior Pastor) while still retaining final authority over such.

9-5. The Session will hold stated meetings at least quarterly. Moreover, the moderator has power to convene the Session when he may judge it necessary; and he will always convene it when requested to do so by any two of the member elders.

9-6 The Moderator of the Session will be elected by the members of the Session to serve for a definite period as determined by the Session. The Moderator has all authority necessary for the preservation of order and for the proper and expeditious conduct of all business before the session, and for convening and adjourning the Session according to its own ruling. In any emergency, he may by telephone, e-mail, or letter, change the time or place, or both, of meeting to which the session stands adjourned, as long as reasonable notice is given.

9-7. The Session will keep an accurate record of its proceedings.

9-8 A clerk or clerks will be elected by the Session to serve for a definite period as determined by the Session. It is the duty of the Clerk, besides recording the transactions, to preserve records carefully, and to grant extracts from them whenever properly required. Such extracts under the hand of the Clerk will be evidence to every part of the Church.

9-9. The Session will keep an accurate record of baptisms, marriages, communing members, non-communing members, and the deaths and separations of church members.

9-10. The term of service on the Session for an elder will be in three year intervals with successive terms being encouraged. An elder may serve on Session if he continues to meet the qualifications of an elder and fulfills the duties of an elder in full or partial capacity. Every three years an elder will review his service with the Session and determine whether he should continue in active service. A note of this review will be recorded by the Clerk.

9-11. Every meeting of the Session will be opened and closed with prayer.

CHAPTER 10.

Jurisdiction of the Session.

10-1. In matters of discipline, the Session is altogether distinct from the civil magistracy, and has no jurisdiction in political or civil affairs. It has no power to inflict temporal pains and penalties, but its authority is in all respects moral or spiritual.

10-2. The jurisdiction of the Session is only ministerial and declarative, and relates to the doctrines and precepts of Christ, to the order of the Church, and to the exercise of discipline.

First, it can make no laws binding the conscience; but may frame symbols of faith, bear testimony against error in doctrine and immorality in practice, within or without the church, and decide cases of conscience.

Secondly, it has power to establish rules for the government, discipline, worship, and extension of the Church, which must be agreeable to the doctrines relating to the Church contained in the Scriptures, the circumstantial details only of these matters being left to Christian prudence and wisdom of church officers.

Thirdly, it possesses the right to require obedience to the laws of Christ. Therefore, it admits those qualified to sealing ordinances and to their respective offices, and it excludes the disobedient and disorderly from such offices or from sacramental privileges. The highest censure to which their authority extends is to cut off the obstinately disobedient and unrepentant from the congregation of believers. Moreover, it possesses all the administrative authority necessary to give effect to these powers.

10-3. The Session has the right to resolve questions of doctrine and discipline seriously and reasonably proposed, and in general to maintain truth and righteousness, condemning erroneous opinions and practices which may injure the peace, purity, or progress of the church.

CHAPTER 11.

Ecclesiastical Commissions.

11-1. A commission differs from an ordinary committee in that while a committee is appointed to examine, consider and report, a commission is authorized to deliberate upon and conclude the business referred to it. It will keep a full record of its proceedings, which will be submitted to the Session. If the concluding actions of the commission are approved, it will become the action of the Session and entered on its minutes. Every commission must be appointed by the Session.

11-2. There are two categories of commissions. One is constituted by elders; the other may be constituted by laity. Matters to be concluded by a commission which invokes the biblical authority of eldership are the taking of the testimony in judicial cases, the invoking of any judicial powers, and the visitation of portions of the church affected with disorder. Other matters, advisory to the Session, allow full participation by the laity. The Session will appoint the commission members and provide the charge to the commission for the work to be accomplished, and record both in the proceedings of the Session. Lay commissions appointed by the Session will consist of communing adult members of the church. A member of the Session will be appointed to represent the Session to lay commissions and, in turn, ensure that the progress and outcomes from the commission are conveyed to the Session. If the elder so appointed actively participates with the lay commission, he will function as its chairman. Otherwise, when the commission is initially convened, it will select its own chairman and determine requirements for a quorum.

11-3. The Session, as a whole, may try a judicial case (including the right to refer any strictly constitutional issue to a study committee with options listed below), or it may of its own motion commit any judicial case to a commission. Such a commission will be appointed by the Session from elders of the church. The commission will try the case and submit to the Session a full statement of the case and the judgment rendered. The Session will approve or disapprove of the judgment, or may refer, (a debatable motion), any strictly constitutional issue(s) to a study committee. In case of referral, the Session will either dismiss some or all the specific charges raised in the case or decide the case only after the report of the study committee has been heard and discussed. If the Session approves, the judgment of the commission will be entered on the

minutes of the Session as the action. If the Session disapproves, it will hear the case as a whole, or appoint a new commission to hear the case again.

11-4. The Session may appoint a Standing Judicial Commission to which it will commit all judicial cases within its jurisdiction. This commission will be led by an elder. Members are appointed for a four-year term. If a member of the Standing Judicial Committee, including the elder, are an involved party in a case, the member will not be advisory, will not vote, and will be recused from influence in any matter involving the case or its outcome.

11-5. The Standing Judicial Commission will make a full report of each case directly to the Session, which report will consist of a summary of the facts, a statement of the issues, the written briefs of the parties, any recommended judgment of a judicial panel, the reasoning of the Standing Judicial Commission, and its judgment. The Session will, without question or debate or discussion, approve or disapprove the judgment, or may refer, (a debatable motion), any strictly constitutional issue(s) to a study committee. In case of referral, the Session will either dismiss some or all of the specific charges raised in the case or decide the case only after the report of the study committee has been heard and discussed. If the Session approves of the judgment, it will be the action of the Session and printed in its minutes. If the Session disapproves of the judgment, it must set the case for hearing before the Session or a special commission appointed by it, and in either instance the case will be tried on the record as delivered to the stated clerk. Any such special commission will then proceed and will report its judgment, in like manner, to the Session for its approval or disapproval. In any event, the full record of the case, including testimony of witnesses, all documents, exhibits and papers will be delivered to the clerk of the Session for permanent preservation.

b. Once a judicial case has been concluded by the Session, parties directly subject to the judgment rendered in the case may request a review and recommendation by a third party affiliated (the affiliate) with the church for the function of conflict resolution. If requested, the Session must consent to, or disapprove, third party review with 30 days of the written request. If approved, the request must be made to the third party by the requesting party, according to procedures established by the affiliate, within 30 days of approval by the Session. If the request is not made to the affiliate within this time period, the initial request to the Session will be considered to be withdrawn. The Clerk of the Session will make all requested documentation available to the affiliate for its review and recommendation. The Session retains the prerogative to accept or decline recommendations made by the affiliate.

CHAPTER 12.

Ordination.

12-1. Those who have been called to office in the church are to be inducted by the ordination of the Session.

12-2. Ordination is the authoritative admission of one duly called to an office in the Church of God, accompanied with prayer and the laying on of hands.

12-3. As every ecclesiastical office, according to the Scriptures, is a special charge, no person will be ordained unless it be to the performance of a definite work.

CHAPTER 13.

Candidates for the Gospel Ministry.

13-1. A candidate for the ministry may be either male or female, shall be a member of the church in full communion who, believing themselves to be called to preach the Gospel, submits themselves to the care and guidance of the Session in their course of study and of practical training to prepare for their office.

13-2. Every applicant for the ministry must put themselves under the care of the Session. Every applicant for care will be a member of the congregation for at least six months before filing their application. Every applicant must file their application with the Clerk of the Session at least two weeks before the regularly scheduled meeting of the Session. An applicant for care may not be received under care and examined for ordination at the same meeting of the Session, since he or she must serve a period of at least one year of internship prior to ordination. An applicant for internship is obliged to be under care and may be licensed to preach the Gospel; further, one who is not already under care may be taken under care, be licensed to preach the Gospel, and become an intern at the same meeting of the Session.

13-3. The applicant will appear before the Session in person and will be examined by the Session on experiential religion and on his or her motives for seeking the ministry. If the testimonials and the examination prove satisfactory, the Session will receive him or her under its care after the following manner:

The Moderator will propose to the applicant these questions:

1. Do you promise in reliance upon the grace of God to maintain a becoming Christian character, and to be diligent and faithful in making full preparation for the sacred ministry?

2. Do you promise to submit yourself to the proper supervision of the Session in matters that concern your preparation for the ministry?

If these questions be answered in the affirmative, the Moderator, or someone appointed by him, will give the candidate a brief charge; and the proceeding will close with prayer. The name of the applicant is then to be recorded on the Session's roll of candidates for the ministry.

13-4. The candidate continues to be a private member of the church, subject to the jurisdiction of the Session. In addition, with respect to his or her preparatory training for the ministry, he or she is under the oversight of the Session. It will be the duty of the Session to show a kindly and sympathetic interest in the candidate, and to give candidates counsel and guidance regarding their studies, practical training, and the institutions of learning they should attend. In no case may a candidate omit from his course of study any of the subjects prescribed in the Form of Government as tests for ordination without obtaining the consent of the Session; and where such consent is given, the Session will record the fact and the reasons for such a decision.

13-5. For the development of their Christian character, for the service they can render, and for their more effective training, candidates, when entering into theological studies, should be authorized and encouraged by the Session to conduct public worship, to expound the Scriptures

to the people, and to engage in other forms of Christian work. These forms of service should be rendered under the direction of Session, and also with the sanction and under the guidance of the candidate's instructors during the time of their being under instruction. Candidates should not undertake to serve a church which is without a pastor as regular supply unless they have been licensed and approved for that supply by the Session having jurisdiction of that church.

13-6. The Session will require every candidate for the ministry under its care to make a report to it at least once a year; and it will secure from the candidate's instructors an annual report on his or her behavior, diligence, and progress in study. The Session will also provide the candidate with a written evaluation of the candidate's performance in the ministries in which he or she participated.

13-7. The Session may, upon application of the candidate, give a certificate of dismissal to another church. The candidate may be allowed to retain membership in his or her home church upon the request of his Session and the approval of both churches involved. A candidate will, at his or her request, be allowed to withdraw from the care of the Session. The Session may also, for sufficient reasons, remove the name of the candidate from its roll of candidates.

13-8. An applicant coming as a candidate from another church must present testimonials of their standing in that body and must become a member of Chesapeake Church. The candidate will at all times come under the care and supervision of the Session.

CHAPTER 14.

Pastoral Positions.

14-1. The various pastoral relations are senior pastor, associate pastor, and assistant pastor. Because senior pastors and associate pastors are members of the Session, these positions are available only to men. Assistant pastors may be men or women.

14-2. The senior pastor and associate pastor are elected by the congregation using the form of call in **BOCO 16**. Being elected by the congregation, they become members of the Session. Assistant pastors are nominated by the senior pastor and confirmed by the Session but are not members of the Session.

14-3. The relationship of the associate pastor to the church is determined by the congregation. The relationship of the assistant pastor to the church is determined by the senior pastor and the Session. The dissolution of the relationship of both is governed by the provisions of **BOCO 18**.

14-4. In order to provide necessary changes in pastorates, a temporary relation may be established between the church and a minister until the congregation elects a new senior pastor. If the Session is unable to secure a regular pastor, then the Session may establish a temporary relation between the church and a qualified person.

14-5. Such temporary relationships can take place at the invitation of the church Session to a minister of the Word, a student in ministerial studies, or an elder. The length of the relationship will be determined by the Session and for no longer than one year, renewable at the recommendation of the Session and consent of the membership by majority vote at a congregational meeting.

CHAPTER 15.

The Qualification and Election of Senior and Associate Pastors.

15-1. Before a candidate can be ordained to the office of pastor, they must receive a call to a definite work.

No candidate will receive a call from Chesapeake Church without the affirmation of the Session. When a call has been presented to the Session from the congregation, and if it is found in order and the Session deems it for the good of the Church, they will place it in the hands of the person to whom it is addressed.

A candidate may not be granted permission by the Session to move on to the field to which he has been called, prior to his examination for licensure or ordination. Likewise, an ordained minister from another denomination, will not move on to the field to which he has been called until examined and received by the Session. Exceptions to this will be recorded by the Clerk of the Session.

A proper call must be written and in the hands of the Session prior to being acted upon by the Session. It must include financial arrangements (such as salary, vacation, insurance, retirement, etc.) between those calling and the one called, and assurance that the definite work will afford the liberty to proclaim and practice fully and freely the whole counsel of God, as contained in the Scriptures and understood in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

15-2. Chesapeake Church should be under the pastoral oversight of a minister, and when the church has no pastor, it should seek to secure one without delay.

A church will proceed to elect a pastor in the following manner: The Session will call a congregational meeting to elect a pulpit committee which may be composed of members from the congregation at large or the Session, as designated by the congregation (*see BOCO 16-7*).

The Session will order a congregational meeting to convene at the regular place of worship. Public notice of the time, place, and purpose of this meeting will be given at least two weeks prior to the time of the meeting.

15-3. When a congregation is convened for the election of a pastor, the Moderator of the Session, or any other active elder on Session, will preside as moderator. All communing members in good standing, but no others, are entitled to vote.

15-4. Method of voting: The congregation being convened, and prayer for guidance having been offered, the moderator will ask of the congregation:

Are you ready to proceed to the election of a pastor?

If they declare themselves ready, the moderator will call for nominations, or the election may proceed by private ballot without nominations. In every case, a majority of the congregation present will be required to elect a pastor.

15-5. On the election of a pastor, if it appears that a large minority of the voters are averse to the candidate who has received a majority of votes, and cannot be induced to concur in the call, the moderator will endeavor to dissuade the majority from prosecuting it further; but if the electors are nearly or quite unanimous, or if the majority insists upon their right to call a pastor, the moderator will proceed to draw a call in due form, and to have it subscribed by them, certifying at the same time in writing the number of those who do not concur in the call, and any facts of importance, all of which will be recorded by the Clerk of the Session, together with the call.

15-6. Form of call: The terms of the call will be approved by the congregation in the following or like form:

Chesapeake Church, being well satisfied of your ministerial qualifications, _____, and having good hope from our knowledge of your labors that your ministry in the Gospel will be profitable to our spiritual interests, does earnestly call you to undertake the pastoral office in this congregation, promising you, in the discharge of your duty, all proper support, encouragement and obedience in the Lord. That you may be free from worldly cares and avocations, we hereby promise and oblige ourselves to pay you the sum of \$ _____ a year in regular monthly (or quarterly) payments, and other benefits, such as housing, retirement, insurance, vacations, moving expenses etc., during the time of your being the regular pastor of this church.

In testimony whereof we have respectively subscribed our names this _____ day of _____, A.D. _____.

Attest: I, having moderated the congregational meeting which extended a call to _____ for his ministerial services, do certify that the call has been made in all respects according to the rules laid down in the *Book of Church Order*, and that the persons who signed the foregoing call were authorized to do so by vote of the congregation.

Moderator of the Meeting

15-7. If the congregation will choose to designate its elders or a committee to sign its call, it will be at liberty to do so. But it will, in such case, be fully certified to the Session by the moderator of the meeting, that the persons signing have been appointed for that purpose by a public vote of the church, and that the call has been in all other respects prepared as above directed.

15-8. When a pastor desires to accept a call from the congregation of Chesapeake Church, while serving another denomination, he must be examined and approved by the Session of Chesapeake Church and must be released for transfer by his present denomination from his pastorate.

15-9. A candidate found fit and called for missionary service by the congregation of a missionary ministry will be examined by the Session for ordination. If approved, the Session will proceed to his ordination.

CHAPTER 16.

The Requirements and Ordination of Senior and Associate Pastors.

16-1. A candidate for ordination will be required to present a diploma of Bachelor or Master from some approved college or university, and a diploma of Bachelor or Master from an accredited theological seminary or authentic testimonials of having completed a regular course of theological studies, or a certificate of completion of an endorsement from a theological study program. The Session, at its discretion, may omit any of these educational requirements. Whenever the Session omits any of these educational requirements, it will always make a record of the reasons for such omission and the parts omitted. The candidate will also present satisfactory testimonials as to the completion and approval of his practice of the ministry.

Requirements for ordination will consist of:

a. A careful examination as to:

1. the candidate's acquaintance with experiential religion, especially his or her personal character and family management (based on the qualifications set out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and Titus 1:6-9),
2. his knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew languages,
3. Bible content,
4. theology,
5. the Sacraments,
6. church history,
7. the principles and rules of the government and discipline of the church.

b. The candidate will prepare a thesis on some theological topic assigned by the Session.

c. The candidate will prepare an exegesis on an assigned portion of Scripture, requiring the use of the original language or languages.

d. The candidate will further be required to preach a sermon before the Session.

e. The Session may omit any of these parts of trial for ordination at its discretion.

The Session, being fully satisfied of the candidate's qualifications for the sacred office, will appoint a day for his or her ordination.

The Session should exercise diligence and care in the use of these provisions in order that they not prevent the ordination of a candidate for whom there are truly exceptional circumstances, nor ordain (nor receive from other denominations) a person who is inadequately prepared for the ministry.

16-2. The day appointed for the ordination having come, and the congregation assembled, a sermon suitable for the occasion will be preached by a person appointed or invited by the Session. The Session member appointed to preside will afterwards briefly recite from the pulpit the proceedings of the Session in preparation for the ordination; he will point out the nature and importance of the ordinance, and endeavor to express to the audience a proper sense of the solemnity of the occasion.

Questions for Ordination

Then, addressing himself to the candidate, he will propose the following questions:

- 1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?**
- 2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will on your own initiative, make known to the Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?**
- 3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of Chesapeake Church, in conformity with the general principles of Biblical polity?**
- 4. Do you promise subjection to your brothers in the Lord?**
- 5. Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote His glory in the Gospel of His Son?**
- 6. Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace of the Church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?**
- 7. Do you engage to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all your duties as a Christian and a minister of the Gospel, whether personal or relational, private or public; and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your manner of life, and to walk with exemplary piety before the flock of which God will make you overseer?**

8. Are you now willing to take the charge of this church, agreeable to your declaration when accepting their call? And do you, relying upon God for strength, promise to discharge to it the duties of a pastor?

Questions to Congregation

16-6. The candidate having answered these questions in the affirmative, the presiding minister will propose to the church the following questions:

- 1. Do you, the people of this congregation, continue to profess your readiness to receive _____, whom you have called to be your pastor?**
- 2. Do you promise to receive the word of truth from his mouth with meekness and love, and to submit to him in the due exercise of discipline?**
- 3. Do you promise to encourage him in his labors, and to assist his endeavors for your instruction and spiritual edification?**
- 4. Do you engage to continue to him while he is your pastor that competent worldly maintenance which you have promised, and to furnish him with whatever you may see needful for the honor of religion and for his comfort among you?**

16-7. The people having answered these questions in the affirmative, by holding up their right hands, the candidate will kneel, and the presiding minister will, with prayer and the laying on of hands of the Session, according to the apostolic example, solemnly set him apart to the holy office of the Gospel ministry. Prayer being ended, he will rise from his knees; and the minister who presides will first, followed by all members of the Session, take him by the right hand, saying, in words to this effect:

We give you the right hand of fellowship, to take part in this ministry with us.

The presiding minister will then say:

I now pronounce and declare that _____ has been regularly elected, ordained, and installed pastor of this congregation, agreeable to the Word of God, and according to the Constitution of Chesapeake Church, and that as such he is entitled to all support, encouragement, honor, and obedience in the Lord: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

After which the minister presiding, or some other elder appointed for the purpose, will give a solemn charge to the pastor and to the congregation, to persevere in the discharge of their reciprocal duties, and then after prayer and the singing of a psalm, or hymn, the congregation will be dismissed with the benediction. The Session will duly record its proceedings.

16-8. After the installation, the congregation then present should come forward to their pastor, and give him their right hand, and welcome him into the fellowship.

CHAPTER 17.

The Dissolution of the Pastoral Relation and The Procedure for Honorable Retirement.

17-1. When a pastor elects to resign his pastoral duties, he will tender his resignation to the Session. The pastor is expected to continue to serve until the Session takes action and an effective date is set. Since the action is initiated by the pastor, the terms of the departure or retirement can be settled by the Session.

If the church desires to be relieved of a pastor, such action is the responsibility of the Session. The pastor is expected to continue to serve in a capacity of their duties determined by the Session, including during any judicial proceedings, until the Session acts and an effective date is set. Affirmation of a change in the calling must be made by the congregation.

The Session needs to determine if the dissolution of the pastoral relationship with a pastor was brought about in Christian love and good order on the part of the parties concerned. Whether the pastor or the church initiates proceedings for a dissolution of his pastoral duties, the congregation will be informed.

The associate or assistant pastors may continue to serve the church when the pastoral relation of the senior pastor is dissolved, but there is no expectation of automatic succession. Procedures for filling pastoral positions are specified in other chapters (*see BOCO Ch. 14-16*). If the departure of the senior pastor occurs suddenly, the session has the prerogative, should it choose, to immediately designate another pastor as acting senior pastor until a pastoral search and ordination can be completed.

17-2. The Session may designate a minister as honorably retired when the minister, by reason of age, wishes to be retired, or as medically disabled when, by reason of infirmity, he is no longer able to serve the church in the active ministry of the Gospel. A minister medically disabled or honorably retired will continue to hold membership in his church. He may serve on committees or commissions if so elected or appointed.

17-3. A minister, being medically disabled or honorably retired, may be designated pastor emeritus by the Session which seeks to honor his past earnest labors among them.

17-4. The clerk of the session will record all prescribed actions of the church in the dissolution of the pastoral relation and provide copies of those records to any member in good standing, if so requested.

CHAPTER 18.

Election, Ordination and Installation of Elders.

Election

18-1. Chesapeake Church will affirm the calling, through an electoral process, of persons to the office of elder in the following manner. Public notice will be given of the time, place, and purpose of a meeting to accept nominations for the office of elder at least one month prior to the appointed time. At this meeting, the congregation will submit names of persons to be considered for the office, keeping in mind that each prospective elder should be an active male member of the church who meets the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

The Session will examine those nominated, and then report to the congregation before election day those eligible for election. In the time between declaration of eligibility and the election meeting, those men who will stand for the office of elder will make themselves available to members of the congregation, either individually or in small groups, so their qualifications for the office may be examined by those they are called to lead and serve.

The prospective officer will be examined in:

- his Christian experience;
- his knowledge of the system of doctrine, government, and discipline of the church;
- the duties of the office to which he has been nominated; and
- his willingness to give assent to the questions required for ordination. (***BOCO 18-4***).

Election of elder candidates will follow upon each nominee completing the Examination and Affirmation Process as outlined by the Session (see document – Examination and Affirmation Process for Elders at Chesapeake Church).

18-2. The session will select an elder as moderator of the congregational meeting.

All communing members in good and regular standing, but no others, are entitled to vote in the election of elders. A majority vote of those present is required for election. The session may open and welcome all others in the church community to congregational meetings.

At the congregational meeting, when a quorum has been established among the voting members, the congregation will vote on the nominees for the office of elder. Those nominees who receive a majority of votes in affirmation of their calling to the office, will then be considered worthy of ordination and installation to the office of elder.

18-3. If one-fourth (1/4) of the communing members of the church at any time request the Session to call a congregational meeting for the purpose of electing additional elders, it will be the duty of the Session to call such a meeting on the above procedure. The number of officers to be elected will be determined by the congregation after hearing the Session's recommendation.

The voters being convened, the moderator will explain the purpose of the meeting and then put the question:

Are you now ready to proceed to the election of additional elders from the slate presented?

If they declare themselves ready, the election may proceed by private ballot without nomination. In every case a majority of all the voters present will be required to elect an elder.

Ordination and Installation

18-4. The day having arrived, and the Session being convened in the presence of the congregation, a sermon will be preached after which the moderator will state in a concise manner the warrant and nature of the office of elder, together with the character proper to be sustained and the duties to be fulfilled. Having done this, he will propose to the candidate, in the presence of the church, the following questions, namely:

- 1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?**
- 2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your initiative, make known to the Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?**
- 3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of this church, in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?**
- 4. Do you accept the office of ruling elder (or deacon, as the case may be) in this church, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy example before the church of which God has made you an officer?**
- 5. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?**
- 6. Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity and edification of the church?**

The elder-elect, having answered in the affirmative, the minister will address to the members of the church the following question:

Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive this brother an elder, and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement and obedience in the Lord to which his office, according to the Word of God and the Constitution of this church, entitles him?

The members of the church having answered this question in the affirmative, by holding up their right hands, the minister will proceed to set apart the candidate, with prayer and the laying on of

the hands of the Session, to the office of elder. Prayer being ended, the members of the Session will take the newly ordained officer by the hand, saying in words to this effect:

We give you the right hand of fellowship, to take part in this office with us.

The minister will then say:

I now pronounce and declare that _____ has been regularly affirmed, ordained and installed an elder in this church, agreeable to the Word of God, and according to the Constitution of Chesapeake Church; and that as such he is entitled to all encouragement, honor and obedience in the Lord: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

After which he will give to the elder and to the church an exhortation suited to the occasion.

18-5. Ordination to the office of elder is perpetual; nor can such office be laid aside at pleasure; nor can any person be degraded this office but by deposition after regular trial; yet an elder may have reasons which he deems valid for being released from the active duties of his office. In such a case the Session, after conference with him and careful consideration of the matter, may, if it thinks proper, accept his resignation and dissolve the official relationship which exists between him and the church. Charges of heresy or immorality are addressed in accordance with Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Timothy 5:17-21.

In such a case the church may take the initiative by a majority vote at a regularly called congregational meeting and request the Session to dissolve the official relationship between the church and the elder without censure. The Session, after conference with the elder, and after careful consideration, may use its discretion as to dissolving the official relationship. In either case the Session will report its action to the congregation. If the Session fails or refuses to report to the congregation within sixty (60) days from the date of the congregational meeting, or if the Session reports to the congregation that it declined to dissolve such relationship, then any member or members in good standing may file a complaint against the Session. A congregational meeting will again be convened. The Session will report to the congregation its reasons for non-action or delay. The congregation will respectfully consider the report of the Session and then vote a second time. If the majority again votes to dissolve the official relationship of the officer, the relationship is dissolved without further action by the Session. However, the action taken will be recorded by the Clerk of the Session

18-6. When an elder who has been released from his official relation is again elected to his office, he will be installed after the above form with the omission of ordination.

18-7. When an elder cannot or does not for a period of one year perform the duties of his office, his official relationship will be dissolved by the Session and the action reported to the congregation.

18-8. When an elder becomes infirm, reaches the age of seventy (70), or reaches a point where his ability to serve on the Session is significantly diminished, he may at his request and with the approval of the Session be designated elder emeritus. When so designated, he is no longer required to perform the regular duties of his office, but may continue to perform certain of

these duties on a voluntary basis. If requested by the Session, he may attend Session meetings, if he so desires, and may participate fully in the discussion of any issues but may not vote.

CHAPTER 19.

Congregational Meetings.

19-1. The congregation consists of all the communing members of a particular church, and they only are entitled to vote.

19-2. Whenever it may seem for the best interests of the church that a congregational meeting should be held, the Session will call such meeting and give public notice of at least two weeks. A minimum of one congregational meeting per calendar year will be held. No business will be transacted at such meeting except what is stated in the notice. The Session will always call a congregational meeting when requested in writing to do so by 25% of the communing members.

Upon such a proper request, if the Session cannot act, fails to act or refuses to act, to call such a congregational meeting within thirty (30) days from the receipt of such a request, then any member or members in good standing may convene the meeting.

19-3. The quorum of the congregational meeting will consist of 25% of the communing members.

19-4. The Moderator of the Session will be the moderator of congregational meetings. If it is impracticable or inexpedient for the Moderator or any other elder to preside, then any male member of the church may convene the meeting. If a member convenes the meeting under **BOCO 19-2**, that member may request any member in good standing serve as the moderator.

19-5. A clerk will be elected by the congregation to serve at that meeting or for a definite period, whose duty will be to keep correct minutes of the proceedings and of all business transacted and to preserve these minutes in a permanent form, after they have been attested by the moderator and the clerk of the meeting. He will also send a copy of these minutes to the Session of the church.

CHAPTER 20.

Amending the Constitution of the Church.

20-1. The Constitution of Chesapeake Church, which is subject to and subordinate to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the inerrant Word of God, consists of its doctrinal standards set forth in the *Chesapeake Church Statement of Faith*, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, together with the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, and the *Book of Church Order*, comprising the Form of Government and the Rules of Discipline, all as adopted by the Church.

20-2. Amendment to the *Book of Church Order* may be made only by approval of the proposed amendment by the Session, and three quarters (3/4) of those present and voting in a congregational meeting.

20-3. Full organic union and consolidation of Chesapeake Church with any other ecclesiastical body may be made only with approval by three-fourths (3/4) vote of those present and voting in a congregational meeting.

Part II - Worship, The Sacraments, and Ceremonies

CHAPTER 21.

The Preaching of the Word.

21-1. The preaching of the Word is an ordinance of God for the salvation of men. Serious attention should be paid to the manner in which it is done. The minister should apply himself to it with diligence and prove himself a "worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

21-2. The subject of a sermon should be some verse or verses of Scripture, and its object, to explain, defend and apply some part of the system of divine truth; or to point out the nature, and state the bounds and obligation, of some duty. A text should not be merely a motto, but should fairly contain the doctrine proposed to be handled. It is proper also that large portions of Scripture be sometimes expounded, and particularly improved, for the instruction of the people in the meaning and use of the sacred Scriptures.

21-3. Preaching requires much study, meditation, and prayer, and ministers should prepare their sermons with care, nor serve God with that which costs them nothing. They should, however, keep to the simplicity of the Gospel, and express themselves in language that can be understood by all. They should also by their lives adorn the Gospel which they preach and be examples to believers in word and deed. They may include any available means to reverently convey the Lord's message to all assembled, including testimony, electronic media, special music, and drama.

21-4. As a primary purpose of the gathering of the church community is to unite the people in acts of common worship of God, ministers should be careful not to make their sermons so long as to interfere with or exclude the important duties of prayer and praise, but should preserve an appropriate portion for all parts of public worship.

21-5. By way of application of the sermon, the minister may urge his hearers by command or invitation to repent of their sins, to put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, and to confess him publicly before men.

21-6. No person should be invited to preach in Chesapeake Church without the consent of the Session. All sermons by people other than the senior pastor or associate pastors will be subjected to pastoral review prior to it being preached to the congregation.

CHAPTER 22.

The Worship of God by Offerings.

22-1. The Holy Scriptures teach that God is the owner of all persons and all things and that we are but stewards of both life and possessions; that God's ownership and our stewardship should be acknowledged; that this acknowledgement should take the form, in part, of giving at least a tenth (tith) of our gross income and other offerings to the work of the Lord through the Church of Jesus Christ, thus worshipping the Lord with our possessions; and that the remainder should be used as a reflection of our Christian lives. All formal members of Chesapeake Church commit to practicing Biblical tithing.

22-2. It is both a privilege and a duty, plainly spelled out in the Bible, to make regular, weekly, systematic and proportionate offerings for the support of the church and for the preaching of the Gospel in our local community as well as in foreign lands, and for the relief of the poor. This should be done as an exercise of grace and an act of worship, and at such time during the service as may be deemed appropriate by the Session.

22-3. It is appropriate that offerings made to the church be dedicated with prayer.

CHAPTER 23.

The Administration of Baptism.

General

23-1. Baptism is not to be administered, in any case, by any private person; but by active elders and ministers of Christ, called to be the steward of the mysteries of God.

23-2. It ought to be administered in the presence of the congregation under the supervision of the Session. In special circumstances, it may be privately administered with the approval of the Session.

23-3. Before baptism, the elder or presiding minister is to use words of instruction, touching the institution, nature, use, and ends of this sacrament, showing,

- a. That it is instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ;
- b. That it is a seal of the Covenant of Grace, of our engrafting into Christ, and of our union with Him, of remission of sins, regeneration, adoption, and eternal life;
- c. That the water, in baptism, represents and signifies both the blood of Christ, which takes away all guilt of sin, original and actual; and the sanctifying virtue of the Spirit of Christ against the dominion of sin, and the corruption of our sinful nature;
- d. That baptizing, or sprinkling and washing with water, signifies the cleansing from sin by the blood and for the merit of Christ, together with the mortification of sin, and rising from sin to newness of life, by virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ;

e. That the promise is made to believers and their children; and that the children of believers have an interest in the covenant, and right to the seal of it, and to the outward privileges of the church, under the Gospel, no less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament; the Covenant of Grace, for substance, being the same; and the grace of God, and the consolation of believers, more plentiful than before;

f. That the Son of God admitted little children into His presence, embracing and blessing them, saying, "For of such is the kingdom of God";

g. That children by Baptism, are solemnly received into the community of the visible Church, distinguished from the world and those who are without, and united with believers; and that all who are baptized in the name of Christ, renounce, and by their Baptism are bound to fight, against Satan, the world, and the flesh;

h. That children are entitled to baptism on the basis of the faith of one of their parents;

i. That the inward grace and virtue of Baptism is not tied to that very moment of time where it is administered; and that the fruit and power of Baptism reaches to the whole course of our life; and that outward Baptism is not so necessary that without it, the infant is in danger of eternal separation from God;

j. For children of believing parents, because of God's covenant ordinance, are non-communing members of the church. When they have reached the age of discretion, they become subject to obligations of the covenant: faith, repentance and obedience. They then make public confession of their faith in Christ, or become covenant breakers, and subject to the discipline of the Church.

The elder or presiding minister who performs the Baptism ceremony is to admonish all who are present to look back to their Baptism, to repent of their sins against their covenant with God; to stir up their faith; to improve and make right use of their Baptism, and of the covenant sealed between God and their soul.

The Baptism of Infants and Children

23-4. After previous notice is given to a member of the Session, the child to be baptized is to be presented, by one or both the parents, or some other responsible person, signifying the desire that the child be baptized. Baptism of infants and children will be preceded by timely notification of family members so they may join in public worship and celebration.

23-5. In his words of instruction prior to the Baptism of infants and children, the elder or presiding minister is to exhort the parent to consider the great mercy of God to him and his child; to bring up the child in the knowledge of the grounds of the Christian religion, and in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The elder or presiding minister is also to exhort the parents to the careful performance of their duty, requiring:

- a. That they teach the child to read the Word of God;
- b. that they instruct their child in the principles of our faith, as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, also concisely summarized in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*;
- c. that they pray with and for their child;
- d. that they set an example of piety and godliness before their child; and endeavor, by all the means of God's appointment, to bring up their child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

23-6. The elder or presiding minister will then read the covenant promises:

The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all who the Lord God will call. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household. (Acts 2:39; Gen. 17:7; Acts 16:26)

The elder or presiding minister will then propose the following questions:

- 1. Do you acknowledge your child's need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit?**
- 2. Do you claim God's covenant promises in (his) behalf, and do you look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ for (his) salvation, as you do for your own?**
- 3. Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God, and promise, in humble reliance upon divine grace, that you will endeavor to set before (him or her) a godly example, that you will pray with and for (him or her), that you will teach (him or her) the doctrines of our holy faith, and that you will strive, by all the means of God's appointment, to bring (him or her) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?**

To the congregation (optional):

Do you as a congregation undertake the responsibility of assisting the parents in the Christian nurture of this child?

23-7. Then the elder or presiding minister is to pray for a blessing to attend this ordinance, after which, calling the child by name, he will say:

I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

As he pronounces these words, he is to baptize the child with water, by pouring or sprinkling it on the head of the child, without adding any other ceremony; and the whole will be concluded with prayer.

The Baptism of Adults

23-8. Un-baptized adults seeking to be baptized must give notice to a member of the Session. Prior to baptism; the candidate for baptism must then be examined and approved by the Session.

23-9. After the elder or presiding minister has concluded the words of instruction on the purpose and meaning of the sacrament of baptism, he will then read the covenant promises:

The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all who the Lord God will call. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household. (Acts 2:39; Gen. 17:7; Acts 16:26)

The elder or presiding minister will then ask the following questions:

- 1. Do you acknowledge yourself (or yourselves) to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?**
- 2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?**
- 3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?**

24-10. Then the elder or minister is to pray for a blessing, after which, calling the person by name, he will say:

I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

As he pronounces these words, he is to baptize the person with water, by pouring or sprinkling it on the head of the person, without adding any other ceremony; and then conclude with prayer.

CHAPTER 24.

The Administration of the Communion.

24-1. The Communion, or Supper of the Lord, is to be observed frequently; the stated times to be determined by the Session, as it judges to be appropriate for the Body.

24-2. Those who have been suspended from the sacraments by the Session, those who have not made a profession of faith, and spiritual seekers, are encouraged to attend the communion service to join in the teaching, singing of praise hymns, and all other parts of the service except they are not to partake of the elements.

24-3. It is proper that public notice should be given to the congregation, at least the Sunday before the administration of this ordinance. The people should be instructed in the nature of communion, and how to prepare their hearts to receive it, that everyone may come to this holy sacrament in a suitable manner.

24-4. On the day of the observance of the Lord's Supper, when the message is ended, the elder or presiding minister will show:

a. That this is an ordinance of Christ; by reading the words of institution, either from one of the Evangelists, or from 1 Corinthians 11, which, as to him may appear appropriate, he may explain and apply;

b. That it is to be observed in remembrance of Christ, to remember His death till He comes; that it is a powerful sacrament that strengthens His people against sin, and supports them in times of trouble; it encourages them in duty; it inspires them with hope and love; it increases their faith and resolution; and it brings peace of conscience, and comfortable hopes of eternal life.

Since, by our Lord's intention, this Sacrament sets forth the Communion of Believers, the minister, at the discretion of the Session, before the observance begins, may either invite all those who profess true faith to participate in the ordinance; or may invite those who have been approved by the Session, after having given indication of their desire to participate. It is proper also to give a special invitation to non-communicants to remain during the service.

24-5. The elder or presiding minister should set the elements apart by prayer and thanksgiving.

The bread and wine being set apart by prayer and thanksgiving, the minister is then to take the bread, and break it, in the view of the people, saying:

The Lord Jesus Christ on the night He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, gave it to His disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me"

After which the bread is to be distributed. After having given the bread, the elder or presiding minister will offer the cup, and say:

He also took the cup, and having given thanks, He gave it to His disciples, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

24-6. Since believers are to act personally in all their covenanting with the Lord, it is proper that a part of the time occupied in the distribution of the elements should be spent by all in silent communion, thanksgiving, intercession and prayer.

24-7. The elder or presiding minister may, in a few words, remind the communicants of the grace of God, in Jesus Christ, held forth in this sacrament; and of their obligation to be the Lord's; and may exhort them to walk worthy of the life to which they have been called; and, as they have professed belief in Christ Jesus the Lord, that they be careful to walk in Him, and to maintain good works.

It may not be improper for the minister to give a word of exhortation also to those who have been only spectators, reminding them of their duty, stating their sin and danger, by living in disobedience to Christ, in neglecting this holy ordinance; and calling upon them to be earnest in preparing for to participate in it at the next time of its celebration.

Then the elder or presiding minister is to pray and give thanks to God, in a manner that reflects the power, beauty, and hope demonstrated in the sacrament of Communion.

After this, a worship song may be sung, and the congregation dismissed, following prayer by the elder or presiding minister.

CHAPTER 25.

Biblical Marriage.

25-1. Marriage is a divine institution though not a sacrament, nor peculiar to the Church of Christ. It is proper that every commonwealth, for the good of society, make laws to regulate marriage, which all citizens are bound to obey.

25-2. Christians should marry in the Lord; therefore, it is fit that their marriage be performed by a lawful minister, that special instruction be given them, and suitable prayers offered, when they enter into this relation. The special instruction will precede the marriage ceremony and include Biblical instructions on the Holy nature of the marriage covenant, instructions for husband and wife, and their responsibilities together as a Christian family. Instruction should also include counseling in temperaments, stewardship, and the stages of marriage. This instruction is to be overseen by a pastor, elder, designated counselor, or lay leader.

25-3. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman, in accordance with the Word of God.

25-4. The parties should be of such years of discretion as to be capable of making their own choice; and if they are underage, or live with their parents, the consent of the parents or others whose care they are under, should be obtained and verified by the minister before he proceeds to officiate the marriage.

25-5. Parents should neither compel their children to marry contrary to their inclinations, nor deny their consent without just and important reasons.

25-6. Marriage is of a public nature. The welfare of civil society, the happiness of families, and the purposes of Christianity, are deeply interested in it. Therefore, it is important that all ministers be careful that, in this matter, they transgress neither the laws of God, nor the laws of the community. And that they may not harm the peace and comfort of families, ministers should be assured that, with respect to the parties applying to them, no just objections lie against their marriage.

25-7. The Clerk of the Session will keep a proper register of the names and the time of marriage of all persons married under the authority of Chesapeake Church, for the review of all whom it may concern. The minister will maintain a separate register of the names of all persons whom he marries, for the perusal of all whom it may concern.

25-8. All Elders on Session are authorized to officiate at weddings under the authority of Chesapeake Church. The Session also has at its discretion the right to appoint qualified men and women to officiate at weddings under the authority of Chesapeake Church.

CHAPTER 26.

Funerals and Memorial Services.

26-1. The services proper for such an occasion are:

- a. The singing of appropriate psalms or hymns;
- b. The reading of some suitable portion or portions of Scripture, with remarks as it may seem proper to the minister to make;
- c. Prayer, in which the grieving will be especially remembered, and God's grace sought on their behalf, that they may be sustained and comforted in their sorrow, and that their affliction may be blessed to their spiritual good.

26-2. The funeral and memorial services are to be left largely to the discretion of the minister performing them, but he should always remember that the proper object of the service is the worship of God and the consolation of the living.

26-3. All Elders on Session are authorized to officiate at funerals and memorial services under the authority of Chesapeake Church. The Session also has at its discretion the right to appoint qualified men and women to officiate at funerals and memorial services under the authority of Chesapeake Church.

Part III – The Discipline Of The Church

CHAPTER 27.

Discipline -- Its Nature, Subjects and Ends.

27-1. Discipline is the exercise of authority given the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ to instruct and guide its members and to promote its purity and welfare. This church is committed to resolving in a biblical manner all disputes that may arise within the body. This commitment is based on God's command that Christians should strive earnestly to live at peace with one another (see Matthew 5:9; John 17:20-23; Romans 12:18; Ephesians 4:1-3). When disputes arise Christians should resolve them according to the principles that are clearly presented in the Holy Scripture (see Proverbs 19:11; Matthew 5:23-25; 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8; Galatians 6:1). Chesapeake Church believes these are essential obligations of its members and essential for the wellbeing of the church.

The term discipline has several applications:

- a. One referring to the whole government, inspection, training, guardianship and direction the church maintains over its members and its officers by virtue of the person's voluntary submission to the oversight, to honor and preserve the honor of God (Romans 2:24);
- b. Another is a practical application of the judicial processes of the church for the restoration of purity within The Body. The purposes of the judicial action are: the rebuke of offenses; the removal of scandal; the vindication of the honor of Christ the promotion of the purity and peace; the general edification of the church, and the spiritual good of offenders themselves, and to guard other Christians from being tempted, misled, divided, or otherwise harmed (Romans 16:17, 1 Corinthians 5:6, 1 Timothy 5:19-20);
- c. The third referring to an effective Biblical method of resolving interpersonal conflicts between persons and restoring fallen Christians to fellowship with God and the body of Christ (Matthew 18:12-14, 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, Galatians 6:1-2, James 5:19-20).

27-2. All baptized persons, and members of the church, voluntarily submit to its discipline and are entitled to the benefits thereof.

27-3. The exercise of all forms discipline is highly important and necessary. Biblical discipline and biblical conflict resolution allows God's love to flourish in the church community. In its proper usage discipline maintains:

- a. The expression of the glory of God,
- b. The purity of His Church,

- c. The peace within The Body and between its members,
- d. The keeping and reclaiming of disobedient sinners.

Discipline is for the purpose of godliness (1 Timothy 4:7); therefore, it demands self-examination under Scripture.

27-4. The authority which Christ has given the church is for building up, and not for destruction. It is to be exercised under a dispensation of mercy and not of wrath. As in the preaching of the Word, the wicked are doctrinally separated from the good, so by discipline the church authoritatively separates the holy from the profane. In this it acts the part of a tender mother, correcting her children for their good, that every one of them may be presented faultless in the day of the Lord Jesus. Discipline is systematic training under the authority of God's Scripture. No communing or non-communing member of the church should be allowed to stray from the Scripture's discipline. Therefore, elders must:

- a. Instruct church leaders in biblical discipline by providing training in the principles offered in the conflict resolution process.
- b. Instruct the congregation in biblical conflict resolution by including such teaching in the membership class; an understanding of biblical discipline is a prerequisite for approval into membership.

27-5. Scriptural law is the basis of all discipline because it is the revelation of God's Holy will.

Proper disciplinary principles are set forth in the Scriptures and are to be followed. They are:

- a. Instruction in the Word for the glorification of God. Chesapeake Church should resist and reject the sinful desire to talk about the offense with others; known as gossip (Proverbs 26:20). Gossip represents a separate offense to a person or the church body and is of itself subject to discipline. Ephesians 4:29 should be used as a filter to protect against gossip and slander;
- b. Individual responsibility to examine one's motives to ensure that any admonishment of another is driven by love for that person and the protection of the church (Matthew 7:5);
- c. Individual responsibility to admonish one another (Matthew 18:15, Galatians 6:1). This responsibility is not restricted to one attempt to restore a relationship to be followed by the calling of one or more witness. If the first act of love to admonish another is not received it is the responsibility of the offended individual to re-examine his or her heart and words to determine the purity of motives (Matthew 7:5) before attempting to gently restore the brother or sister;
- d. If the admonition is rejected, then the calling of one or more witnesses (Matthew 18:16) is appropriate. Only after a heartfelt reflection should the offended individual call on one or more witnesses to be able to affirm that the offense had been appropriately expressed and subsequently rejected. These witnesses are not to be secondary accusers. These witnesses' primary role is to pray for the reconciliation of the relationship and the glorification of God. The offended party should honor God by not gossiping with the witnesses thus circumventing the ability of the Holy Spirit to convict all parties involved of their individual wrongs;

e. If personal and informal attempts to resolve an offense are unsuccessful, Jesus says in Matthew 18:17 to “Tell it to the church.” At Chesapeake Church “telling it to the church” is defined as telling the church elders and requesting their direct assistance in resolving the offense. In some cases, one or more elders may repeat the previous attempts directed by the Holy Scripture and try to talk personally and informally with the offender. Each officer of the church has an individual Christian responsibility to pursue reconciliation of offenses. An Elder should not act unilaterally as a representative of the Session unless directed by the Session. If rejection persists, then the Church must act through her ~~court~~ elders unto admonition, suspension, excommunication and deposition (see BOCO Chapter 31).

Steps (a) through (e) must be followed in proper order for the proper exercise of discipline.

CHAPTER 28.

Disciplining of Non-Communing Members.

28-1. The spiritual nurturing, instruction and training of the children of the church are committed by God primarily to their parents. They are responsible to the church for the faithful discharge of their obligations. True discipleship involves learning the Word of God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit both at home and in the church. Without learning there is no growth and without growth there is no discipline and without discipline there is sin and iniquity (1 Timothy 4:7).

28-2. The home and the church should also make special provision for instructing the children in the Bible and in the church doctrines. The Session will encourage the parents of the church to guide their children in the teaching and disciplining of them in the Christian faith.

28-3. The church should maintain constant and sympathetic relations with the children. It also should encourage them, upon maturity, to make confession of the Lord Jesus Christ and to enter upon all privileges of full church membership. If they are wayward, they should be cherished by the church and every means used to reclaim them.

28-4. Adult non-communing members, who receive with meekness and appreciation the oversight and instruction of the church, are entitled to special attention. Their rights and privileges under the covenant should be frequently and fully explained, and they should be warned of the sin and danger of neglecting their covenant obligations. Adult non-communing members are encouraged to seek instruction in church discipline and conflict resolution offered by the church.

28-5. Minors of communing members who live under the parental roof will be deemed under the care of the church as non-communing members.

CHAPTER 29.

Offenses.

29-1. An offense, the proper object of judicial process, is anything in the doctrines or practice of a person professing faith in Christ which is contrary to the Word of God.

The Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Westminster Assembly, together with the formularies of government, discipline, and worship are accepted by Chesapeake Church as standard expositions of the teachings of Scripture in relation to both faith and practice. Nothing, therefore, ought to be considered by any court as an offense, or admitted as a matter of accusation, which cannot be proved as such from Scripture.

29-2. Offenses are personal or general, private or public; but all of them being sins against God, are therefore grounds of discipline.

29-3. Personal offenses are violations of the divine law, considered in the special relation of wrongs or injuries to particular individuals. General offenses are heresies or immoralities having no such relationship to any particular individual.

29-4. Private offenses are those which are known only to a few persons. Public offenses are those which are notorious. Notorious is to be understood as any sinful activity that is generally or widely known to the community as a direct result of the sinful behavior itself and not a result of gossip.

29-5. Any offended individual has a first obligation to consider how the offense may be overlooked. Being able to overlook offense is the first level of conflict resolution and a sign of spiritual maturity. An offense that requires action is one that has persisted for a detrimental period of time, causes separation of the offended party from the offender or from the church, the offense is hurting the body of Christ in general and/or Chesapeake Church in the specific, because of its notoriety, or the offense is placing someone in the community at risk of being harmed.

CHAPTER 30.

Church Censures.

30-1. The censures which may be inflicted by the session are admonition, suspension from the Sacraments, excommunication, suspension from office, and deposition from office. In all cases of censure, the goal is to reclaim a wayward or a delinquent believer. The censure of admonition or censure of definite suspension from office will be administered to an accused upon conviction. Censure remains in effect until the person satisfies the court session as to his/her repentance and makes such restitution as is appropriate. Such censure concludes the judicial process. The censure of indefinite suspension or censure of excommunication will be administered to an accused upon conviction that remains impenitent.

30-2. Admonition is the formal reproof of an offender by a church court, warning him of his guilt and danger, and exhorting him to be more circumspect and watchful in the future.

30-3. Suspension from Sacraments is the temporary exclusion from those ordinances and is definite as to its duration. There is no indefinite suspension from the Sacraments.

Suspension from office is the exclusion of a church officer from his office. This may be definite or indefinite as to its duration. With respect to church officers, suspension from Sacraments will always be accompanied by suspension from office. But suspension from office is not always necessarily accompanied with suspension from Sacraments.

Definite suspension from office is administered when the credit of religion, the honor of Christ, and the good of the delinquent demand it, even though the delinquent has given satisfaction to the ~~court~~ session.

Indefinite suspension is administered to the impenitent offender until he exhibits signs of repentance, or until by his conduct, the necessity of the greatest censure is made manifest. In the case of indefinite suspension from office imposed due to scandalous conduct, the deposed officer will exhibit for a considerable time such an eminently exemplary, humble, and edifying life and testimony so as to heal the wound made by his scandal. If the Session is satisfied with the change exhibited by the deposed officer, he may be restored to his office.

30-4. Excommunication is the removal of an offender from the communion of a particular church. This censure is to be inflicted only on account of gross crime or heresy and when the offender shows he is unwilling to accept the admonishment of the church. This censure should occur when the sinner continues to harden his heart after repeated appeals and absolutely refuses to listen to the church. Holy Scripture teaches that the offender or sinner should be treated as you would a pagan or a tax collector (Matt. 18:17 see also 1 Cor. 5:2-7, 11-13). The design of this censure still is to reach the offender as a means of reclaiming him, to deliver the church from the scandal of his offense, and to inspire all with fear by the example of his discipline.

30-5. Deposition is the degradation of an officer from his office or a ministry leader from a leadership position and may or may not be accompanied with the infliction of other censure.

CHAPTER 31.

The Parties in Cases of Process.

31-1. The Session of Chesapeake Church has jurisdiction over all cases at Chesapeake Church.

31-2. It is the duty of the Session to exercise care over those subject to their authority. They will with due diligence and great discretion demand from such persons satisfactory explanations concerning reports affecting their Christian character. This duty is more imperative when those who deem themselves aggrieved by injurious reports ask for an investigation.

If such investigation, however originating, should result in raising a strong presumption of the guilt of the party involved, the Session will institute process and will appoint a prosecutor to prepare the indictment and to conduct the case. At all times any accused party is still treated with the presumption of innocence.

31-3. The original and only parties in a case of process are the accuser and the accused. The accuser is always Chesapeake Church, whose honor and purity (as the Bride of Christ) are to be maintained. The prosecutor, whether voluntary or appointed, is always the representative of the church, and as such has all its rights in the case. The prosecutor may be the offended party in a personal offense.

31-4. An injured party will not become a prosecutor of personal offenses without having tried the means of reconciliation and of reclaiming the offender, required by Christ. (BOCO 22-5)

“If your brother sins against you go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won him over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ (Matthew 18:15-16).

The church Session, however, may judicially investigate personal offenses as if general when the spiritual health of the individual and the well-being of the congregation seem to require it.

31-5. When the offense is general, the case may be conducted by either any person appearing as prosecutor, or by a prosecutor appointed by the session.

31-6. When the prosecution is instituted by the session, the previous steps required by our Lord in the case of personal offenses are not necessary. This prosecution applies only if the injured party has pursued the biblical process identified in chapter 18 of the book of Matthew. There are many cases, however, in which it will promote the interests of the church to send a committee to converse in a private manner with the offender, and endeavor to bring him or her to a sense of their guilt, before instituting actual process. The purity and peace of The Body are paramount and shall be pursued at every cost. There is a mutual goal of restoring the integrity of the church and reclaiming a delinquent brother or sister. Every effort to keep the matter private as long as possible shall be made as evidenced in Matthew 18.

31-7. Great caution should be exercised in receiving accusations from any person who is known to indulge a malignant spirit towards the accused; who is not of good character; who is himself under censure or process; who is deeply interested in any respect in the conviction of the accused; or who is known to be litigious, rash or highly imprudent.

31-8. Every voluntary prosecutor will be previously warned that if he fails to show probable cause of the charges, he may himself be censured as a slanderer of his brother or sister.

31-9. When a member of the Session is under process, all of his official functions may be suspended at the court's session's discretion; but this will never be done in the way of censure.

31-10. In the discussion of all questions arising in his own case, the accused will exercise the rights of defendant only, not of judge.

31-11. When a case is brought to the Session the offended party voluntarily agrees to accept the Session's disposition of the matter. If either party to a case remains in disagreement, he commits to restrict his conversation on the matter in order to prevent the sin of gossip.

Either party may consider continuing the process as identified in the appendices.

Appendices

1. If upon resolution of any church discipline process the party under process remains in disagreement of the findings of the court the party may, with permission of the Session, proceed with mediation and/or arbitration through Peacemaker Ministries, Spokane, Washington. The cost of said process is to be the responsibility of the party under process, except if through God's grace the Session should decide to share in the cost.

2. In cases involving general offenses or corporate differences wherein 2/3 of the Chesapeake communing members stand in disagreement with the direction of the church or Session oversight, the Session, shall agree, after a duly called Congregational Meeting requested by 25% of the communing members, to pursue mediation and/or arbitration through the Peacemaker Ministries, Spokane, Washington. If notification of offense by 2/3 of the communing members is in God's grace unable to sway the Session, then the cost of mediation/arbitration shall be on the church. Mediation is defined as a third-party hearing both sides of an issue and coming to a mutually agreed upon resolution. Whereas arbitration is defined to mean that a third party hears both sides of an issue and thereby coming to a decision that is binding upon both parties.