

Anacostia River Church Constitution

(Adopted December 10, 2015)

Preamble

Since it pleased Almighty God, by His Holy Spirit, to call some of His servants to unite here in southeast Washington, D.C., under the name Anacostia River Church, to worship God and spread the gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ, we, the members of Anacostia River Church adopt this Constitution as our bylaws, to be interpreted at all times to reflect the character of Jesus Christ and bring Him glory, as revealed in the Holy Bible and articulated in the Statement of Faith and Covenant of this church.

Article 1 - Name

1.1 This church shall be known as Anacostia River Church.

Article 2 - Purpose

2.1 The foundation of this church is the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20), and He guides His church in all affairs through the Holy Scriptures (Psalm 119; 2 Tim. 3:15-17). Therefore the purpose of this church is to glorify God through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit in accord with the Holy Scriptures (Isa. 43:7; Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).

2.2 The priorities of ministry of this church flow from the vision of God's glory revealed in Jesus Christ. We exist to savor this vision in worship (John 4:23), strengthen the vision in nurture (1 Cor. 14:26; 2 Peter 3:18), and spread the vision in evangelism, missions, and loving deeds (Matt. 5:16; 28:18-20; 1 Pet. 2:9; 3:15).

2.3 To remain true to our Lord and His word, this church must be marked by preaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27; 2 Tim. 4:1-2), administering baptism (Matt. 28:19; Rom. 6:1-4) and the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:17-34), loving one another (John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:11-24; 4:7-12), and practicing formative discipline (i.e., instruction that shapes us more into Christ's likeness) (1 Thess. 5:14; 1 Tim. 5:1-2; Tit. 2:15) and corrective discipline carried out by a majority of the congregation with the aim and hope of eventual restoration (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-5).

2.4 In pursuing of these priorities and displaying these marks, we aim especially to emphasize: (1) the message of the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-7); (2) ministries of mercy to meet physical needs (Luke 10:35-37; Titus 2:14, 3:8, 14; James 2:15-16); (3) helping men, women, and families mature according to God's complementary design for men and women in their own households

(Gen. 2; Prov. 31; Eph. 5:15-6:9; Col. 3:15-4:1; I Tim. 5:1-22, 6:1-2; Titus 2:1-15; I Peter 2:11-3:9) and in the church, which is the household of God (Eph. 2:19, I Tim. 3:15; I Pet. 4:17); (4) multiplying Anacostia River Church as the Lord may allow by planting other churches in and around southeast Washington, D.C.; and (5) sending missionaries around the world (Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 10:15).

Article 3 - Membership

Section 1 - Qualifications

3.1.1 To qualify for membership in this church, a person must be a believer in Jesus Christ who gives evidence of regeneration, who has been baptized in obedience to Christ, following his or her regeneration, and who wholeheartedly believes in the Christian faith as revealed in the Bible. Each member must sustain the doctrines of our church and not hold any settled convictions contrary to them, in accord with our Statement of Faith, and must promise to keep the commitments expressed in the Church Covenant.

3.1.2 The normal process for becoming a member is completion of all sessions of the Anacostia River Church's membership class, an assessment of a person's qualification for membership in an interview with a pastor, and a vote by the entire church on the basis of the person's profession of faith.

Section 2 - Admission of Members

3.2 To be admitted into church membership, applicants shall be recommended by the pastors for admission and accepted by vote of at least 51% of the members present at any regular or special meeting of the members, recognizing that members of Christ's church should strive for unity in all things (Eph. 4:1-6). At that point, newly elected members shall relinquish their membership in other churches.

Section 3 - Duties and Privileges of Membership

3.3.1 In accord with the duties listed in the Church Covenant, each member shall be privileged and expected to participate in and contribute to the ministry and life of the church, consistent with God's leading and with the gifts, time, and material resources each has received from God. Only those who are members of this congregation shall be entitled to lead in the ministries of the church.

3.3.2 It is the privilege and responsibility of members to attend all members' meetings and vote on the election of officers, on decisions regarding membership status, and on such other matters submitted to a vote.

Section 4 - On Church Discipline

3.4.1 Formative discipline is inherent in the preaching, teaching, and exercise of other ministries in the church. When formative discipline fails due to unrepentant sin, corrective discipline is then necessary. Corrective discipline is for the good of the church and the member who has sinned. It is never to be entered into lightly or rashly. The goal of corrective discipline is always remedial, that is, the goal is always the salvation and holiness and good of the one being disciplined.

3.4.2 Any member consistently neglectful of his or her duties or guilty of conduct by which the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be dishonored, and so opposing the welfare of the church, shall be subject to the admonition of the pastors and the discipline of the church, according to the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17 and the example of Scripture. Church discipline, then, should ordinarily be contemplated after individual private admonition has failed. Church discipline can include admonition by the pastors or congregation, removal from office, and excommunication (see Matthew 18:15-17; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; 1 Timothy 5:19-20; 1 Corinthians 5:4-5).

3.4.3 The purpose of such discipline should be:

1. For the repentance, reconciliation, and spiritual growth of the individual disciplined (Heb. 12:1-11; Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:5; Gal. 6:1);
2. For the instruction in righteousness and good of other Christians, as an example to them (1 Cor. 5:11; 1 Tim. 5:20; Heb. 10:24-25);
3. For the purity of the church as a whole (1 Cor. 5:6-7; Eph. 5:27; Rev. 21:2);
4. For the good of our corporate witness to non-Christians (Matt. 5:13-16; John 13:35; Acts 5:10-14); and
5. Supremely for the glory of God by reflecting His holy character (Deut. 5:11; John 15:8; Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:12).

3.4.4 It is desirable in the case of public sin that a confession be made at an appointed meeting of the church, so that the church can freely extend forgiveness. Such public confession is especially necessary in the case of pastors and deacons (1 Tim. 5:19-20; Gal. 2:11-14).

Section 5 - Termination of Membership

3.5 Termination of membership shall be recognized by the church following the death, transfer of membership, or voluntary resignation of any church member who is in good standing. Membership may also be terminated as an act of church discipline (ordinarily, but not necessarily, at the recommendation of the pastors) and with the vote of 51% of the members present at any regular or special meeting of the members, recognizing that members of Christ's church should strive for unity in all things (Eph. 4:1-6).

Article 4 - Meetings

Section 1 - Worship Meetings

4.1 Worship services shall be held each Lord's Day, and may be held throughout the week as the church determines.

Section 2 – Members' Meetings

4.2.1 In every meeting together, members shall act in that spirit of mutual trust, openness, and loving consideration which is appropriate within the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

4.2.2 There shall be a regular members' meeting at least every quarter, at some time apart from the Sunday morning service, and at a time acceptable to the membership. The pastors shall see that the stated meetings of the church are regularly held and that required reports are submitted to the church by the responsible members.

4.2.3 Special members' meetings may be called as requested by the pastors, or at the written request, submitted to the pastors, of one-third of the membership. In the event of a written request from the members, the pastors shall call a special meeting to be held within one month after receiving the request.

4.2.4 The pastors shall present at a members' meeting a budget to be approved by the membership no more than three nor less than one month before the start of the fiscal year. The fiscal year will commence on January 1.

4.2.5 The pastors shall designate a moderator at all members' meetings of the church. The date, time, and purpose of any regular or special meeting shall be announced at all public services of the church at least two weeks preceding the meeting. Provided all constitutional provisions for notification have been met, a quorum shall be understood to be met by those members present.

4.2.6 Meetings shall be run according to Robert's Rules of Order. On any matter that is brought to vote, a majority vote is needed for it to pass (unless this constitution specifies otherwise), recognizing that members of Christ's church should strive for unity in all things (Eph. 4:1-6). Abstentions will not be considered as votes cast. Only votes cast by members present at the time of the meeting will be counted.

4.2.7 Resolutions adopted by the pastors shall be reported to the church at members' meetings and may be reversed by the church by a majority vote of the members present.

Article 5 - Officers

Section 1 - Summary

5.1.1 Jesus Christ is the Lord and head of this church and He rules primarily through the Scriptures.

5.1.2 The biblical offices in the church are elders and deacons, but the church is governed by the congregation. The biblical terms “elder,” “pastor,” and “overseer” are understood to refer to the same biblical office. All pastors-elders-overseers possess the authority and gifts of pastors, whether or not they are paid by the church. In addition, our church recognizes the administrative positions of secretary and treasurer, as well as paid ministerial staff (who are not considered officers) as needed. All officers and ministerial staff must be members of this church before assuming their responsibilities.

Section 2 - Pastors

5.2.1 Subject to the will of the congregation, the pastors shall provide broad oversight to the ministry, financial management, and resources of the church. In keeping with the principles set forth in Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; 5:17; Tit. 1:5-9; Jas. 5:14; and 1 Pet. 5:1-4, the pastors shall seek the mind of Christ through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the word of God as they undertake the work of shepherding God’s flock. The pastors shall teach and exhort; refute those who contradict the truth; pray for the sick; care for the church’s members; devote themselves to prayer, to the government of the church and to ministry.

5.2.2 The pastors shall be comprised of not less than three men who satisfy the qualifications for the office of elder set forth in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Tit. 1:6-9. Only men may serve as pastors in accord with 1 Tim. 2:12; 3:2. A majority of the pastors must receive no financial compensation from the church. No pastor shall hold the office of deacon during his tenure.

5.2.3 The church shall recognize men gifted and willing to serve in this calling, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on elections. These men shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as pastors. This recognition shall be submitted to the church for reaffirmation every three years under the procedure outlined in section 5.2.5. Upon the completion of that term, he shall be eligible for another term if duly elected by the membership.

5.2.4 Some pastors may receive pay for their labors. In recommending that the congregation call a new pastor, or after a new pastor has been recognized by the congregation, the pastors may also recommend that the pastor be compensated on a full-, part-time, or contract basis for his work (I Tim. 5:17, I Cor. 9).

5.2.5 All pastors, whether paid or unpaid, shall be called to serve three-year terms. There shall be no limit on the number of consecutive three-year terms a pastor may serve. Near the conclusion of each three-year term, and at the discretion of the pastors’ collectively any time before the conclusion of the three-year term, the pastors collectively or a subcommittee from their number will conduct a review of each pastor. The review will address the pastor’s biblical qualifications,

character, pastoral competence, and theological conviction. Based upon the review, the pastors or their subcommittee may recommend that the congregation affirm the pastor's calling and with the congregation's approval the pastor shall continue in another three-year term. Should the pastors or the subcommittee instead decide not to recommend the pastor to another term, the pastors will notify the congregation and the pastor's service shall end at the conclusion of his term.

5.2.6 Any two members with reason to believe that a pastor should be dismissed should express their concern to at least two pastors and, if need be only afterwards, to the congregation. Any such action shall be done in accordance with the instructions of our Lord in Matt. 18:15-17 and 1 Tim. 5:17-21. Any pastor may be dismissed by a 51% vote of the members at any formally called members' meeting of the church, recognizing that members of Christ's church should strive for unity in all things (Eph. 4:1-6).

5.2.7 A pastor employed by the church may be dismissed from employment by his supervising pastor, if any. Such dismissal from employment does not automatically result in dismissal from the pastorate. At the discretion of the pastors collectively he may continue to serve out his term. In the event that a staff pastor resigns his staff position, yet remains a member in good standing, he may continue service in his office as a non-staff pastor until his term expires.

5.2.8 The pastors shall take particular responsibility to oversee worship services; administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper; equip the membership for the work of the ministry; encourage and teach sound doctrine; admonish and correct error; oversee the process of church discipline; coordinate and promote the ministries of the church; mobilize the church for world missions; examine and instruct prospective members; examine and recommend all prospective candidates for offices and positions; receive, hold and disburse a fund for benevolence (reporting to the church the total receipts and disbursements for the overall benevolence fund); and oversee the work of the deacons and appointed church agents and ministries. The pastors are further to ensure that all who minister the word to the congregation, including outside speakers, share our fundamental convictions.

5.2.8 The pastors may recommend the establishment of paid positions for assisting in the work of the ministry. A paid position may or may not be occupied by a pastor. If occupied by a pastor, that person must be duly recognized and appointed as such by the congregation. In proposing new paid positions, the pastors shall present job descriptions for each position to the membership for approval. The job descriptions must identify any reporting and/or supervisory relationships. The pastors will report hiring and firing decisions for paid staff to the congregation.

5.2.9 The pastors shall elect a chairman who shall serve as chairman of pastors' meetings. In the absence of the chairman, the pastors shall appoint another pastor to fulfill these duties.

5.2.10 The chairman of the pastors shall serve as the president of the corporation.

Section 3 – Deacons

5.3.1 The office of deacon is described in 1 Tim. 3:8-13 (cf. Acts 6:1-7). The church shall recognize, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on elections, men and women who are giving of themselves in service to the church, who possess gifts of ministry, and who are called to further service and care for the church's members. The number of deacons shall be determined by the needs of the ministry and the call and qualifications of men and women in the church. These members shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as deacons. This recognition shall be reaffirmed by the church every three years. After a deacon has served two consecutive two-year terms, he or she shall not be eligible for re-election to the diaconate for at least one year.

5.3.2 Deacons shall advise and assist the pastors in any service that shall support and promote the ministry of the word, new and existing ministries of the church, and the care of the members of the congregation. The deacons may be organized in the most fitting way to accomplish the mission of the church.

5.3.3. Deacons exercise a ministry of service. Deacons may teach and preach in contexts in which they are not infringing upon the oversight duties of pastors (Acts 6-7:53; Titus 2:3).

5.3.4 No money shall be solicited by or on behalf of the church or any of its ministries without the approval of a majority of the pastors.

Section 4 - Secretary

5.4.1 It shall be the duty of the secretary to record the minutes of all regular and special members' meetings of the church, to preserve an accurate roll of the membership, and to provide reports as requested by the pastors, deacons or the church.

5.4.2 The church secretary shall ensure that dated copies of the most recent revision of this constitution shall be available for all church members.

Section 5 - Treasurer

5.5 The treasurer, who shall not be an active pastor or a paid church staff member, shall ensure that all funds and securities of the church are properly secured in such banks, financial institutions, or depositories as designated by the church. The treasurer shall also ensure that full and accurate accounts of receipts and disbursements are kept in books belonging to the church, and that adequate controls are implemented to guarantee that all funds belonging to the church are appropriately handled by any officer, employee, or agent of the church. The treasurer shall render to the pastors annually, or whenever they may require it, an account of all transactions as treasurer and of the financial condition of the church. The treasurer shall also be responsible for presenting regular reports of the account balances, revenues, and expenses of the church at regular members' meetings.

Article 6 - Elections

Section 1 - Principles

6.1 The process for church elections shall be interpreted and carried out to fulfill the following principles:

1. Substantial prayer, both individually and corporately, shall be an integral part of the election process.
2. Nominations shall proceed with the support of the pastors.
3. All candidates for church office shall be treated with the grace, kindness, and honesty appropriate in evaluating fellow members.
4. The election process shall express that spirit of mutual trust, openness, and loving consideration which is appropriate within the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.
5. Members of Christ's church should strive for unity in all things (Eph. 4:1-6)

Section 2 - Selection of Officers

6.2.1 A slate of names of any nominees to serve as pastors, deacons, secretary, and/or treasurer shall be presented by the pastors and made known to the church at least one month before voting. Any member with reason to believe that a nominated candidate is unqualified should express his or her concern to at least two pastors before the vote. Members intending to speak in opposition to a candidate should express their objection to at least two pastors as far in advance as possible before the relevant church members' meeting at which the church votes on the candidates.

6.2.2 The chairman of the pastors shall declare as elected those persons receiving a 67% majority of all votes cast for any office.

6.2.3 The persons elected shall assume their respective offices upon election.

Article 7 - Indemnification

Section 1 - Mandatory Indemnification

7.1 If a legal claim or criminal allegation is made against a person because he or she is or was an officer, employee, or agent of the church, the church shall provide indemnification against liability and costs incurred in defending against the claim if the pastors determine that the person acted (a) in good faith, (b) with the care an ordinarily prudent person in a similar position would exercise under similar circumstances, and (c) in a manner the person reasonably believed to be in the best interest of the church, and the person had no reasonable cause to believe his or her conduct was unlawful. The church shall purchase appropriate insurance to meet these potential liabilities.

Section 2 - Permissive Indemnification

7.2 At the discretion of the pastors, the church also may indemnify any person who (a) acted in good faith and reasonably believed that his or her conduct was in the church's best interest and (b) either believed that his or her conduct was not unlawful or failed to abide by a law that the pastors determine to be in contradiction to biblical obligations.

Section 3 - Procedure

7.3 If a quorum of the pastors is not available for an indemnification determination because of the number of pastors seeking indemnification, the requisite determination may be made by the membership or by special legal counsel appointed by the membership.

Article 8 - Dispute Resolution

8.1 Believing that the Bible commands Christians to make every effort to live at peace and to resolve disputes with each other in private or within the Christian church (see, e.g., Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 6:1-8), the church shall urge its members to resolve conflict among themselves according to biblically based principles, without resorting to the civil courts.

8.2 An important exception to this principle exists for alleged criminal behavior (see Rom. 13:3-4), not least because such behavior may in some cases legally be required to be reported to government authorities.

8.3 Consistent with its call to peacemaking, the church shall encourage the use of biblically based principles and avoiding lawsuits to resolve disputes between the church itself and those outside the church, whether Christian or pagan and whether individuals or corporate entities. The pastors shall adopt policies and procedures to effect these aspirations.

Article 9 - Amendments

9.1 The Statement of Faith and Church Covenant may be amended by a 75% vote of the members present and voting at a members' meeting, provided the amendment shall have been offered in writing at the previous members' meeting, and shall have been announced from the pulpit at church services two successive Sundays prior to such vote.

9.2 This constitution may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting at a members' meeting, provided the amendment shall have been offered in writing at the previous members' meeting, and shall have been announced from the pulpit at church services two successive Sundays prior to such vote.