

## **On the Governing of Redeeming Grace Church Part II: Practical Application**

“I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”  
Jesus Christ. (Matt. 16:18)

### **Purpose**

The pastors, joined by the Polity Working Group (PWG), have sought to answer one foundational question: How is Christ’s authority expressed in our local church? The first paper prepared by the PWG, “On the Governing of Redeeming Grace Church,” (first polity paper) provided a theological framework of church government in our local church. In summary, we concluded that Christ’s authority is expressed “through the elders with the congregation.” The paper outlined broad principles, not detailed specifics, and sought to sketch out the framework for our polity.

This second paper (“Part II: Practical Application”) provides specific explanations for how authority is expressed in our local church, and will provide support for the changes we propose to make to our governing documents, i.e., the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. We are seeking to provide points of definition and application that are biblical, flexible, simple, and clear - elements necessary to define our church’s polity; however, *this paper is not intended to provide the level of detail found in a Church Constitution, a Book of Church Order or a Policy Manual.*

### **1. Foundational Principles from “On the Governing of Redeeming Grace Church”**

- Christ is the King, Chief Shepherd, and Head of our church.
- Christ rules primarily through His Word and by His Spirit.
- The authority of Christ rests in the whole assembly of the church and not in one person or group of persons within the church.
- Christ’s rule is expressed through the elders with the congregation.
- The elders will function in plurality; be biblically qualified; and love, know, teach, lead, and care for the flock.
- All members of the church will have an active role in the life and direction of the church as they are able to be involved. Members will provide to the elders loving, honest and constructive input and feedback (both pro and con) regarding issues, pending decisions, the direction of the church, ministries, and other facets of Redeeming Grace Church (RGC) and its leadership, in order to help them do the best possible job of leading the congregation.
- The practice of the elders leading, with the congregation having an important role in decision-making, creates a healthy and dynamic tension within a local church. This tension produces a beneficial environment of iron sharpening iron (Prov. 27:17) that is important to the wholesome life, ministry, and effectiveness of the church.

## 2. Authority Expressed “Through the Elders”

Scripture uses clear language for the roles of elders in their leadership of local churches: they are leaders, overseers, shepherds, and teachers who are responsible for leading, caring for, feeding, and protecting the flock. The Bible uses various names for elders to emphasize these functions, but by using these names interchangeably and as synonyms, it is evident that these references are to one office. It is also clear that the elders are servants of God and of the church. Thus, to be true to this clear pattern in the Bible, we know that elders will shepherd and govern RGC.

The elders’ authority derives not from their title or their office, but from Christ and His Word. The scope of their authority is as prescribed by Scripture, no less and no more. If the elders attempt to lead the church in areas that have no biblical basis or in ways that are out of step with the gospel, then the congregation has no obligation to follow since their consciences are bound by Scripture. In this situation, the congregation has the responsibility to speak to the elders and express concerns – and the elders are obligated to listen and to be vigilant to keep RGC on solid biblical grounds.

Listed below is a summary of the key principles regarding elders in our local church:

- A. Qualifications for Elders:** The Bible provides clear guidance regarding elder qualifications. Key passages are I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. Please see pages 5-6 of the first polity paper for a discussion of elder qualifications.
- B. Plurality of Elders:** RGC will be governed by a plurality of elders who will determine priorities and processes for accomplishing the work of the church. A plurality is defined as more than one, and preferably 3 or more. All elders are equal in authority.
- C. Staff and Non-Staff Elders:** It is the intention of the leadership of the church that the elders be made up of both “staff elders” (those paid to be elders) and “non-staff elders.” The elders will have equal authority, but may be specialized in function and may commit different numbers of hours to their eldership duties each week. Their equal authority is under Christ in their governing of our church, and manifests itself in part through the “one elder, one vote,” principle. While both staff and non-staff elders will be referred to as “elders,” it is possible that other terms such as “pastor” will naturally arise based on an elder’s role and duties, and cultural familiarity with these terms.
- D. Number of Elders:** No limit will be placed on the number of elders serving at any one time. Practical circumstances including size of the congregation, the gifting of the elders and the gifting and availability of other elder-qualified men, will be considered. The advantages of having a significant number of non-staff elders include: 1) Greater sharing of the responsibilities for shepherding and overseeing the congregation, and 2) More effective discussions and decision-making and

implementation for decisions because the greater variety of life experiences and vocations. It may take a period of years to grow the number of elders to an appropriate and stable size under our revised polity framework, but the elders will move toward this, working with the congregation to recognize men that God has gifted and raised up for this office.

- E. Term of Service and Sabbaticals for Elders:** The Bible does not provide any specific guidelines as to how long an elder should serve in the local church as long as he continues to qualify and desires to serve. Therefore, wisdom and historic church practice indicate that elders can serve indefinitely as long as calling, health, and circumstances allow. However, an elder who no longer believes that God is calling him to serve as an elder may resign.

Furthermore, there may be a season when an elder decides it would be best to take a sabbatical from his elder duties due to family, work, health, fatigue or other valid reasons. An elder may request a sabbatical for a defined period of time. The elders may approve the sabbatical or decide upon a different course of action.

- F. Compensation of Elders:** Staff elders are those who are paid by RGC either full or part time. Scripture does not require that all elders be paid, though it appears wise and desirable for some to be paid (1 Tim. 5:17-18).

- G. Licensing of Elders:** The purpose of ministerial licensing at RGC, as required by the Commonwealth of Virginia, is to officially recognize pastoral gifting and responsibility in elders who will have the authority to perform weddings. The elders will determine which elders should be licensed. Staff and non-staff elders may be licensed.

- H. Duties of Elders:** Elders are responsible for lovingly governing the church, teaching the Word of God, and “tending the flock” as overseers (1 Pet. 5:1-3)<sup>1</sup>. They must know well the condition of the flock. Their responsibilities include:

1. Bringing God’s Word into the life of the church through teaching, leading, and continuously proclaiming the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the primary responsibility of elders (1Tim. 3:2, 5:17; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9, 2:1);
2. Giving themselves to diligent study of the Scriptures and fervent prayer;
3. Consistently offering their lives as examples to the flock, including living life in obedience to Scripture, in dependence on God and for the glory of God;
4. Equipping the saints for the work of ministry to enable the full functioning of the body of Christ;
5. Helping every member become a disciple-making disciple and mature in Christ;
6. Instructing, examining, and affirming baptism and membership candidates;
7. Admonishing and/or disciplining members when needed;

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<sup>1</sup> See also section 4, “Who are the elders and what do they do?” in our paper, “On the Governing of Redeeming Grace Church”

8. Caring for the sick, elderly, hurting, struggling, non-participating, and those experiencing other trials and hardships;
9. Promoting prayer within the church;
10. Establishing strategic long-term goals and objectives for the church; and leading and guiding their implementation;
11. Being led the Spirit to clarify and guard church doctrine and/or practices, including the formulation of consequent church policies;
12. Guarding the church from threats from within and outside the church;
13. Training men aspiring to pastoral ministry and leadership, and to maintain an orderly succession of elders; and
14. Prepare the church members to go into the world through mercy and evangelistic ministry.

### **3. Authority Expressed “With the Congregation”**

In the foundational principle above, *Christ’s rule is expressed through the elders with the congregation*, the phrase, “with the congregation” asserts a degree of decisional, governmental authority and responsibility that lies with the congregation as a whole. Below, we explain the specific aspects of that congregational authority as we see it in Scripture.

The term “congregation” (or “members”) refers to those believers in our local church who have given a clear testimony and evidence of saving faith in Jesus Christ; have completed a preparatory course of instruction; have been interviewed by the elders; have been baptized; and have been accepted into membership by the elders and the remainder of our church.

In the church, there is no elite class that has special access to God on the one hand, nor any ungifted Christians on the other. Foundational to our understanding of the authority of the congregation is the concept of the “priesthood of believers,” which indicates that all believers have direct access to God the Father through Christ. 1 Pet. 2:9 says, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (See also 1 Pet. 2:5.) Believers are indwelt with the Holy Spirit, have direct access to God and His Word, and have God’s wisdom available to them (Jam. 1:5); in some instances, they collectively make decisions in their local church.

In Scripture, various passages indicate that there is some authority vested in the congregation. Most New Testament (NT) letters were written to entire local churches, not to one or more of the elders, or other individuals or groups within those churches. Those letters communicate many things, including direction to the church to take certain actions. Thus, Christ’s authority as expressed in these letters is directed to entire congregations. The Scriptures also include descriptions of the congregation participating with the church’s leaders in some governing actions. Hence, we conclude

that certain authority regarding governing of the local church is vested in the congregation.

Some examples from Scripture of how congregations express Christ's authority include:

### **Selection of Leaders**

- Acts 6:3-6 - The congregation was involved in the selection of those called to serve the widows in the church.
- Acts 15:22 - The congregation decided, along with the elders and Apostles, on the setting apart and sending of leaders to be involved in gospel ministry.
- 1 Cor. 16:3 - The congregation was involved in the selection of church delegates.

### **Teaching/Sound Doctrine**

- Galatians 1:9 - The church is held responsible to protect themselves against false teachers.

### **Church Discipline**

- Matt. 18:17, 1 Cor. 5:4 - The congregation has an important role in the discipline of church members.
- 1 Cor. 6:4-8 - The congregation is expected to be able to resolve conflicts within the church.
- Gal. 6:1 - The congregation is exhorted to provide private and thoughtful admonition each other (i.e., private discipline).
- 1 Tim 5:19-20 - The congregation can bring charges against an elder. Elders who need to be rebuked are done so before the congregation.

### **Financial Decisions**

- 2 Cor. 8-9 - The congregation was to make arrangements for collection of monies for relief of the poor.

There is very little explanation of how these decisions were made and we do not observe a pattern of democratic majority vote in NT churches; however, on certain occasions, congregational input was quantified as part of decision-making processes. We did not determine that Scripture describes cases where the authority was exclusively the prerogative of, and at the initiative of the congregation, apart from the elders, but was done in conjunction with the elders (and Apostles in some cases in the first-century church).

## **4. The Bible's Balanced Approach to Authority**

While the NT gives us some explicit instruction about, and various examples of how the first century churches were governed, it doesn't give detailed instructions on how to organize and exercise authority in a local church. We intentionally chose the phrase, "through the elders with the congregation" to reflect the balance we see in Scripture

between the authority that Christ gives to church leaders – the elders – and the authority that resides within the church as a whole – the congregation.

We believe that the Lord has given leaders from within the congregation to govern local churches. We also believe the local congregation shares responsibility for the health and well-being of the church. There is a tension in Scripture for how Christ's authority is expressed in the local church. D.A. Carson observes:

“In fact, in the New Testament, there is a running tension between the authority that rests in the church and the authority bound up with the elders-pastors-overseers. There's a running tension because, quite frankly, either side can go bad. Thus, in 2 Corinthians 10-13, there are leaders in the church who Paul says should be kicked out by the church. And if the church does not affect this discipline, then when he gets there he, as an apostle, will take action and remove them. On the other hand there are passages like Hebrews 13 where the emphasis is on obeying the leaders. After all, the church as a whole can go bad, or simply be in need of instruction and discipline more generally. The leaders are supposed to take primary responsibility. But, in fact, sometimes they have to be disciplined too, so there is a running tension in this pattern in the New Testament.”<sup>2</sup>

This balanced approach of “leadership through the elders with the congregation” is also consistent with prudential wisdom and Scripture. In the situations where the writer of a letter in the NT exhorted a church to take action, it is reasonable to understand that the church's response would normally have needed to be organized, and thus led by godly leaders in the congregation. Therefore, it is reasonable that in these situations, the elders (or other leaders to whom they delegated) led the congregation in their response.

To further define our approach, the elders are to pastor, govern, teach, make decisions, and set direction for the church on an ongoing basis. And all church members (i.e., the congregation) provide input to elders (Prov. 15:22); encourage, support and hold elders accountable, both in informal settings and formally if necessary; and participate formally in major decisions. As Paul instructs in I Thessalonians 5:12-13, church members are “... to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.” That loving respect and esteem should involve prayerful encouragement and support, in words and in actions.

In addition, it should involve understanding that their elders are also fellow sinners saved by grace; are tempted in various ways; and are limited in time, resources, knowledge, and wisdom. Members are also to hold their elders accountable and work to restore them to the proper path when they see them straying in their personal lives or

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<sup>2</sup> “Defining Elders” by D.A. Carson (taken from a lightly edited transcript of a talk given by Carson at Capitol Hill Baptist Church)

as they lead the church. This loving, prayerful, active support and input is both informal, through conversations and dialogue, and formal, through voting on key decisions.

Some guiding principles are:

- Elders govern with support and discerning input from the congregation.
- On all matters pertaining to the church, members are encouraged to give input and make suggestions. Input from members to elders is often via informal conversation. It should involve real encouragement, exhortation and serious discussion about church matters, family and other life issues. This will be the most common means of congregational input.
- Through Member Meetings, church-wide emails, etc., the elders will communicate with members concerning the status of ongoing issues, major upcoming decisions, the biblical basis and rationale to explain changes being considered, etc., and will invite feedback through all appropriate means. The elders will carefully consider the congregation's input as they make decisions, and will inform the congregation of their decisions as appropriate and in a timely manner.
- When decisions relate to individuals and private matters that do not affect the entire congregation, the elders will strive to limit the disclosure of information in order to respect the dignity and privacy of those individuals.
- When members have information that is essential for the elders to be aware of in order to make the ultimate decision in important situations, their input will be actively solicited at the appropriate time in the process and will be carefully considered.
- The members will be asked to "vote" on specific major decisions, as outlined on pages 8-14 of this document.
- Any decisions that are necessary for the governance of the church that are not specifically addressed in this document will be made by the elders.

## **5. Church Member Meetings (formerly called "Family Meetings")**

**A. Church Year:** The Church Year occurs from September 1 through August 31.

**B. Member Meetings:** Generally, there will be two (2) regular Member Meetings held each year. The meetings will be held at a time and place designated by the elders. The purpose of these meetings is for the elders to communicate with the church on key matters related to the vision, direction, and activities of the church; to formally welcome and introduce new members; to notify the congregation of members who have left the church; to vote on matters outlined below; and to discuss key issues with the church.

Those regularly attending SGC or exploring membership and children of members will typically be welcome at Member Meetings as non-voting guests. If special

circumstances make it necessary, the elders will make it clear that a specific meeting or a portion of a meeting will be closed to non-members.

A public announcement of all regular Member Meetings will be made at least thirty (30) days in advance. The meetings will be announced by the elders in the Sunday worship service, and also via posting on the church website, an email to church members, or by other similarly public means. The notifications will include the specific topics to be covered at the meetings.

- C. Special Member Meetings:** Under normal circumstances announcement of special members meetings will be at least 30 days in advance. However, in order to preserve the church's ability to respond to urgent and unexpected situations, special member meetings may be called by giving a public announcement of at least seven (7) days in advance. The meetings will be announced by the elders in the Sunday worship service, and also via posting on the church website, an email to church members, or by other similarly public means. The notifications will describe the specific topics to be covered at the meetings.

## 6. Voting

The elders need to be free to maintain the routine operation of the church without undue complexity in decision-making processes. Also, due to our large size, there are necessarily decisions being made within different ministry groups throughout our church that don't involve every member. However, some matters are so significant that they will involve receiving input from across the membership. Although "voting" is not explicitly mentioned in Scripture, there were unspecified methods that were used to quantify congregational input in certain major decisions. We believe that asking the membership to vote on key questions is the best approach to ensure the congregation gives input in a clear and formal manner. The voting process will occur in a manner that insures the integrity of the voting system.

When the members of RGC are asked to vote, the elders will make every effort to provide them with the information they need to vote in an informed manner. While these voting processes are formal and structured, the elders will work to understand the perspectives and concerns of the members on the matters being voted on, and to resolve concerns and promote unity.

- A. Eligibility:** All members in good standing of RGC are eligible to vote.
- B. Quorum:** A quorum will consist of no less than twenty percent (20%) of the church membership. A quorum must be present at all Member Meetings in order to conduct voting.
- C. Vote Required for Decision:** Matters requiring voting are described below. Some votes will require a simple majority (defined as greater than 50% of a vote that meets the quorum standard) while others, that relate to very foundational or long-

term decisions that cannot be easily reversed, will require a super-majority (defined as at least 67% of a vote that meets the quorum standard).

**D. Members Must Be Present to Vote:** All voting will take place during church Member Meetings. There will be no provision for absentee or proxy voting. It is important for church members to attend these meetings, hear background information, discuss the issues as appropriate, hear questions and answers, join in prayer, and express their input by voting.

[Note: we understand and regret that this approach creates difficulties for some members who will find it difficult to be present for all votes. However, we have researched this question with many other churches and are adopting what we understand to be a generally accepted practice, for the reasons stated above. We want to evaluate this approach as we go and are willing to revise in the future, if that proves wise and helpful.]

**E. Method of Voting:** The elders will determine the procedures for voting. This may include, but is not limited to, the issuance of a ballot to each church member in attendance at the Member’s Meeting.

**7. Matters Requiring Member Voting**

The members will be asked to vote on matters involving the appointment of elders, the removal of elders, the discipline of elders, denominational affiliations that RGC forms with other churches or groups, changes to our governing documents, and major financial decisions.

This table summarizes the votes required for approval in each area and the matters are described in more detail below.

**Summary of Topics Members Will Vote on and Percentages of Votes Required for Approval**

Subject of Membership Vote	Percent of Members Voting Required for Approval*
A. Appointment of Elders	Super Majority (at least 67%)
B. Removal of Elders (non-discipline cases)	Super Majority (at least 67%)
C. Discipline of Elders	Super Majority (at least 67%)
D. Denominational Affiliation (or Disaffiliation)	Super Majority (at least 67%)
E. Changes to Statement of Faith, Articles of Incorporation, and Bylaws	Super Majority (at least 67%)
F. Major Financial Decisions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Budget &amp; Related Budget Decisions</li> </ul>	Simple Majority (greater than 50%)

• Major Financial Commitment Decisions	Super Majority (at least 67%)
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\* Number Voting Must Constitute a Quorum.

## A. Appointment of Elders:

It is the responsibility of RGC's elders to train new elders, entrusting the gospel "to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (2 Tim. 2:2) There will be four major steps in this process:

### 1. Identification.

The elders, in awareness of leadership needs within the church, as well as the need for planting more churches, will regularly and prayerfully consider the qualifications of individuals to meet those needs. The congregation is encouraged to continually let the elders know of men they see "acting like elders" and demonstrating leadership gifts and graces. Men who desire to be elders are always encouraged to make that known to the elders.

### 2. Training

As mentioned above, the elders will work toward the goal of equipping every church member to become a disciple-making-disciple. In addition, they will regularly disciple and train men for eldership. The goal of this training is to assess and develop godly character as well as competency in understanding and rightly handling God's word. We seek men who are able to lead, care for, teach, and guard the flock. We do not plan to publish the names of those men who are being considered or in some way trained for eldership since: 1) this training will be ongoing; 2) some of it will be informal and some formal; 3) men may progress through the training at different speeds; and 4) some may drop out for a variety of reasons.

### 3. Nomination

When the elders believe they have a candidate (or candidates) qualified to serve as an elder, the congregation will be informed and a Members Meeting will be scheduled to conduct the vote. The time between the announcement of elder candidate names and the vote will be an important opportunity for the congregation to get to know the candidates and for the congregation to provide feedback to the elders about individual candidates. This congregational input phase will be at least 60 days.

The elders reserve the right to withdraw a candidate's name during the nomination process. This could occur in response to congregational input, changed circumstances in the man's life, or some other factor.

### 4. Selection

Following the 60-day period, members will vote on the proposed candidates at a Member Meeting. A super-majority (67%) vote is required to appoint an elder.

Special Note: The elders governing the church at the time of the congregational approval of RGC's new polity and revised Bylaws have met the criteria and fulfilled a process that was established at the time each elder was installed. Since all current church members, by virtue of joining and remaining in the church, have accepted the current elders in this office, the current elders are not subject to the new selection, training, and appointment process described above. Rather, they will remain as elders. After the approval of the new polity and revised Bylaws, the current elders will be subject to the updated practices summarized in this paper and established in the Bylaws.

## **B. Removal of Elders**

RGC may find it necessary to remove an elder due to his performance. The case of egregious sin, requiring elder discipline is described on pages 10-12 of this document. Apart from that, it is possible for an elder's performance of his duties to degrade due to spiritual, health or other reasons. If those circumstances arise and the elder is not willing to resign, it will be the responsibility of the elders to lead RGC in the removal of the elder. However, those circumstances are likely to be rare and complex, and are impossible to predict. Therefore, an appropriate process will be developed for each situation. Since the appointment of elders requires a super-majority vote by the congregation, their removal also requires a super-majority (67%) vote by the congregation.

## **C. Discipline of Elders**

The Bible says that a local church's leadership is not to receive an accusation against an elder except when offered by at least two witnesses. However, this doesn't preclude a member from approaching an elder directly, sharing a concern, and asking questions. If the member (or fellow elder) does not believe the concern was adequately addressed, the member can proceed informally by going back to the elder with one or more additional witnesses. However, if the situation is still not resolved, with at least two witnesses approaching the elder, then the matter will be brought before the elders. (See Matt. 18:15-17 and 1 Tim. 5:19-20.)

### **1. Formal Discipline of an Elder**

- a. **Jurisdiction:** In the event that an accusation is brought forth that may require the discipline of any elder, the elders will assume responsibility for the investigation, and if necessary, for the disciplinary process.
- b. **Investigation:** The elders will investigate the allegations against the elder. If the charges appear credible, are substantiated by two or more witnesses, and involve moral impropriety, doctrinal error, or any charge that is harmful to

the witness of the gospel and the Church, the elders will take the following steps:

- **Task Force:** The elders will form a task force made up of elders and non-elder church members to further investigate the claims and make a preliminary determination of the elder's guilt or innocence. Additionally, depending on the nature of the accusation, the elders may choose to hire the services of an outside reconciliation ministry to assist in the process; however, their input and counsel would be non-binding.
  - **Reporting Task Force Findings:** The task force will bring the results of its investigation in a written report to the elders, who will investigate further, if necessary, and determine the guilt or innocence of the accused elder according to the criteria of Scripture and the process outlined below.
  - **Elder Duties During the Investigation:** The elders will determine if any changes need to be made to the charged elder's responsibilities.
- c. **Elder Adjudication:** A super-majority (67%) vote of the elders is necessary to find an elder guilty of the charges brought against him.
- If the accused elder is found guilty, the elders will determine the recommended consequences of the finding. Any recommendation, up to and including removal from office, will require a super-majority (67%) vote of the elders. (Removal from church membership may also result, as described on page 15 of this document.)
  - If the accused elder is not found guilty, the elder will be fully restored to ministry. If he has been put on temporary leave, that leave will be terminated. The elders will determine how best to communicate to members the decision and any subsequent actions to be taken regarding the restored elder, including efforts to restore the relationship between the elder and the one(s) who brought the accusation.
- d. **Membership Vote for Removal and Elder Opportunity for Appeal:** If the elders find an elder guilty, the elders will notify the church and a Member's meeting will be scheduled to conduct the vote for the elder's removal from office. This is also the opportunity for the elder to appeal the elders' recommendation for removal and other consequential actions. At that member meeting, the elders will present the necessary details of the case and their recommendations. The details of the elder's discipline case will be brought to the entire church in accordance with 1 Tim. 5:20.

If the elder who has been found guilty by the elders chooses to, he may present his perspective on the facts of the case and appeal to the members to vote against his removal and the associated consequences.

The elders will invite the congregation to ask questions and provide feedback to the elders about the situation, prior to voting.

Since the appointment of elders requires a super-majority vote by the congregation, their removal also requires a super-majority (67%) vote by the congregation. This situation differs from the discipline of church members, which (as discussed below) may not necessarily involve the entire church, rather a subset of the church, and neither the acceptance or removal of a member require votes of the congregation.

- e. **Public Rebuke:** If the guilty elder is removed from office, the elders will publicly address and exhort the elder before the members to call for repentance (I Timothy 5:20) and the congregation will also have a chance to pray for the elder's repentance and restoration.
- f. **Reconciliation:** The elders, in consultation with the congregation if appropriate, will determine what, if anything needs to be done to bring reconciliation to affected church members, regular attendees, and members of the community.

#### **D. Denominational Affiliation**

The church members will vote on the elders' recommendations regarding any RGC denominational affiliation with other churches. Denominational affiliation is defined as entering into a binding agreement with an organization that requires a financial commitment and/or acceptance of a statement of faith. SGC will use the following process to enter into such agreements:

- 1. Governing Authority:** The elders will not affiliate in a manner that creates bodies outside of the church that have authority over our church.
- 2. Purpose:** The elders desire to affiliate with other like-minded churches and/or other Christian organizations to share in mission work, give and receive advice, and to experience mutual edification through gospel-advancing and God-glorifying activities.
- 3. Announcement:** The elders will present facts and recommendations regarding the proposed affiliation to the membership before a vote, with no less than 30 days for prayer, study, and discussion.
- 4. Membership Vote:** A super majority (67%) vote is required to approve a decision for affiliation or disaffiliation.

## **E. Changes to Statement of Faith, Articles of Incorporation, and Bylaws**

The members have committed to support these documents and they must have formal input into changing them if they are to continue their commitment to the church.

- 1. Purpose of Changes:** The elders will only seek to amend and change our key governing documents and theological positions when necessary and will do so in accordance with Scripture and prudential wisdom.
- 2. Announcement:** The elders will present facts and recommendations to the membership before a vote, with no less than 30 days for prayer, study, and discussion.
- 3. Membership Vote:** A super majority (67%) vote is required to approve any changes to the Statement of Faith, Articles of Incorporation, and Bylaws.

## **F. Major Financial Decisions**

The congregation will vote on major financial decisions, including acquisition and/or disposition of significant assets.

There is no record of NT churches having buildings and budgets, but for practical and legal reasons local churches own property and have budgets today. The church operates based on financial contributions from the congregation. If bad financial decisions are made, there may be consequences, which the congregation would have to recover from. In addition, the church could lose its land, buildings, and other property. Therefore, congregational input is prudent in these financial decisions.

- 1. Financial Advisory Committee (FAC):** The church will maintain a Financial Advisory Committee (formerly known as the “Financial Advisory Team”) to provide input and recommendations to the elders on major financial decisions and issues. The FAC will be composed of one or two elders, the church administrator, and at least three non-paid members of the church.
- 2. Financial Matters Requiring a Membership Vote:** The congregation will vote on the following financial matters, with the input and recommendation of the FAC and the elders:

### **Simple Majority Vote (greater than 50%):**

- a. Annual Church Budget** as recommended by the Church Administrator and FAC and reviewed/refined by the elders. All such financial-decision votes will be for or against the entire budget or proposal, not budget line-by-budget line, or by individual elements of proposals. The annual budget

utilizes the Church Year as the fiscal year.

**Super Majority Vote (67%):**

- a. Individual financial decisions** that commit more than 10% of our church's annual budget; and
  - b. Incurring debt** that will last for more than 60 days, such as the church-building mortgage.
- 3. Announcement:** The elders will present the budget and/or information regarding other financial decisions to the membership before a vote, including the written recommendation of the FAC, with no less than 30 days for prayer, study, and discussion. Policies will be developed to insure members are able to give input and preparatory meetings may also be scheduled to provide members an opportunity to discuss the proposals with members of the FAC and the elders.
  - 4. Non-Approval of the Annual Budget:** In the event that the congregation does not approve the proposed budget, the elders will continue the previous year's budget at the same spending levels for each major budget category. However, if the church revenue has declined such that there are insufficient funds to continue at the previous year's budget levels, there will be spending cuts to balance the interim budget. The elders will communicate to members that the church will be operating on the interim budget until such time as the budget is revised and approved.

**8. Matters Requiring Membership Involvement, But Not a Vote**

**A. Acceptance of Church Members**

A church member is a believer who has completed the membership process for our church. Unless the elders know of reasons an individual should not be allowed to join RGC, the elders will notify the congregation of church-member candidates' names, allowing time for at least a 30-day evaluation period. During that time period, members may express to the elders any concerns that would disqualify a person from membership, or any patterns of serious, unrepentant sin. After weighing congregational inputs carefully, the elders will vote on the membership of church-member candidates, notify the new members of their approval as members (or disapproval, if that is the case), and introduce the new members to the congregation.

Note: at the time of the adoption of new by-laws, all members at that time will be considered to be approved as members under the new by-laws.

**B. Discipline of Church Members**

All members of our church are expected to conduct their lives according to the standards set forth in Scripture. Such conduct includes moral purity, personal honesty, promotion of church unity, and biblical fidelity. Members are to be consistent examples of authentic Christianity as they seek to emulate the character of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. (See Rom. 8:28-29, 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:16-25; Eph. 4:3, 25, 5:1-10, 18; 2 Tim. 3:1-17; and Titus 3:10-11.). The church is commanded to discipline its members when they continue in open and habitual sin. (See Matt. 18:15-18; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 2:6-11, 7:8-10; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15.)

RGC's policies regarding church member discipline will follow the steps laid out in our statement on church discipline.

1. If it appears that it may be necessary to remove a member, the elders will inform all or a portion of the members, allowing for a reasonable period in which to express any concerns or comments prior to the member's formal removal from membership.
2. The elders will make the decision to terminate a person's membership only after due consideration and prayer. However, cases of open, flagrant, ongoing sin may call for immediate termination of membership, as directed by 1 Cor. 5. After discussing with the person (or attempting to discuss, if the person is unwilling) the reason for termination, it will also be clearly stated in a pastoral letter that will be delivered to the terminated member.
3. The congregation will be notified whenever a member is removed from the church rolls due to church discipline.

## **9. Deacons**

The Bible provides for wide latitude for the office of deacon to promote the work of ministry in and through the church. Deacons can do this in ways that involve many members in weighty and meaningful ways, while allowing the elders to focus on the ministries of the Word and prayer, and protecting the elders from becoming overwhelmed with the many temporal needs of the flock. The word "deacon" means "servant." Furthermore, unlike elders, deacons are not required to teach. Thus, their ministry is oriented in directions of service, mercy, and administration, rather than governing and teaching. While the Bible clearly establishes the office of deacon and RGC will be blessed to have deacons, we desire that each member of our church find ways to serve and lead as they are gifted by the Holy Spirit, trained, equipped, and empowered.

Deacons, individually or collectively, are not part of a separate governing or ruling body. They are church members who have been delegated authority by the elders for service to the church. They have authority to execute their administrative and serving responsibilities within the limits assigned by the elders.

Since deacons will exercise various degrees of leadership and service in RGC and there are complex implementation issues associated with establishing this office, the PWG decided that additional time was necessary to fully study and discuss this topic. The PWG is committed to carefully working through these issues, including soliciting input from the congregation. Once the PWG has developed recommendations for implementing the office of deacon in our church, a supplemental paper will be issued.

## **Conclusion**

The PWG is seeking to provide points of definition and application that are biblical, flexible, simple, and clear. The processes, policies and practices described in this paper are considered the essential elements necessary to define our church's polity. As consensus emerges between the elders and the full PWG, and the church members, the content of this paper will be translated into RGC's new Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation.

*Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.  
Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.  
Ps. 127:1*