Sovereign Hope Church Constitution

Article I — Preamble

Christ Himself established the New Testament church. This means, first, that the Christian church is built upon Him and belongs to Him (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:11). Scripture declares Christ to be the cornerstone and foundation (Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 3:11), as well as its Head and Chief Shepherd (Col. 1:18; 1 Pet. 5:4). Likewise, the church of God has been purchased with Christ's own blood, the blood of the New Covenant (Eph. 5:25; Acts 20:28).

Secondly, because the Christian church has been ordained by God and belongs to Him, it is holy and set apart, just as the Old Covenant people once were (Ex. 19:5–6; 1 Pet. 2:9). Consequently, the Christian church is not a mere human convention, social gathering, or simple fellowship. The church of God consists of believers who have entered into the New Covenant by faith in Christ alone (Jer. 31:31–33; Gal. 3:26).

This church of God, purchased with Christ's blood (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25), is manifested in particular congregations throughout all the earth (1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:11); and it is the duty of each individual Christian to be committed to and connected with a *Biblically ordered* congregation — more specifically one located in their geographical area (Heb. 13:17; 1 Cor. 12:18).

Furthermore, in light of these truths and the words of Jesus Christ that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His church (Matt. 16:18), we therefore, as members of the New Covenant, go forward with firm faith and assurance in our Lord's promise, and set forth this constitution to aid in founding and ordering a local congregation in the greater Jacksonville, Florida area.

Article II — Purpose

In submission to Scripture, we confess that the chief purpose of our church is to glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31; Eph. 3:21). This is accomplished through reverent

worship (John 4:23–24; Heb. 12:28), proclaiming Christ to sinners (Matt. 28:19–20; 2 Cor. 5:20), and building up our members through preaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) and observing Christ's sacraments (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:23–26). To these ends, we humbly set forth the following constitution as an aid in organizing and governing this local congregation.

Article III — Name

The name of this church shall be Sovereign Hope Church.

Article IV — Statement of Faith

Scripture is our ultimate authority — namely, the Word of God, consisting of its sixty-six books.

Additionally, our various creeds and confessions express an important part of who we are as a church. Although not infallible, we hold these creeds to be an accurate expression of the orthodox and historic Christian faith.

We therefore confess and believe together with our fathers in the faith and our brothers throughout the world. We are baptized into their company as members of the same body, the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with them we eat of a common loaf and drink from a common cup. Their creed is our creed, even as their life is our life—one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. The pastors of Sovereign Hope Church therefore subscribe to these creeds and confessions, holding them to be a faithful witness to Scripture and a means of identifying with the broader Christian Church.

With this in mind, when this constitution refers to the Sovereign Hope Church Statement of Faith, it is referring to the Book of Confessions as a whole.

The Book of Confessions includes the ancient creeds — the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Definition of Chalcedon, and the Athanasian Creed. Moreover, we identify with the tradition of Classical Protestantism and have adopted the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith as well.

Because the Second London Baptist Confession can be extensive, we have also adopted the Evangelical Statement, which provides a concise and accessible summary of the same essential doctrines of the Christian faith.

These confessions are to be used as the doctrinal standard of the church and a guide for teaching, according to their place and purpose as described in the Book of Confessions.

Article V — Membership

Because the church consists of those who confess the faith set forth above, the following provisions – grounded in Biblical principles – govern membership in Sovereign Hope Church.

Section 1 — Eligibility

Individuals are eligible for membership in Sovereign Hope Church if they have professed faith in Christ and have been properly baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). Membership begins when the covenant membership vows have been taken (Philem. 2; Heb. 13:7, 17).

Church officers will oversee a membership list, which includes names, baptisms, and communicant status.

Section 2 — Membership Vows

Our membership vows are:

> "Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in need of salvation by Christ, and do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving and resting upon Him alone as He is offered in the gospel?"
>
> "Have you been baptized in accordance with His Word?"
>
> "Do you vow before God, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, to live in a manner worthy of followers of Christ?"
>
> "Do you vow before God to support the ministry of this church in its worship and work, submitting to its government and discipline, while pursuing its purity and peace?"

When the vows are presented to the head of a household, he will also be asked whether he speaks on behalf of his household.

When these vows are taken, the congregation will respond with “Amen” when they are asked:

“As a congregation of Christ, do you receive [this Christian/these Christians] into the covenant fellowship of this local church together with you, renewing your membership vows as you do so?”

Section 3 – Communicant and Non-Communicant Members

Communicant and non-communicant status refers to a member’s participation in the Lord’s Supper (Communion).

A communicant member is one who has been properly baptized and admitted to the Lord’s Table – under the oversight of the elders. Baptized children in member households who have been admitted to the Lord’s Table are recognized as communicant members of the church. A baptized child may partake of Communion provided the child has professed faith in Christ and is able to follow the instruction given by their parents at each observance of the Supper.

A non-communicant member ordinarily refers to a child within a member household who has not yet been admitted to the Lord’s Table. Children in member households who have not yet been baptized, or who have not yet come to the Lord’s Table, are recognized by the elders as non-communicant members of the household.

Under the headship of Christ, the responsibility for administering the sacraments belongs to the elders of the church. Nevertheless, the elders recognize and respect the responsibility of parents in guiding their children toward faithful participation in the ordinances of Christ.

Section 4 — Release or Transfer of Membership

If any member requests to be released to the care of another faithful Christian church, the elders will ordinarily grant the request and release him with their blessing.

If any member requests to be released while disciplinary proceedings are pending against him or someone in his household, the elders will delay acting upon that request until the disciplinary matter has been resolved.

If members move from our geographical area, they are charged to unite with a faithful Christian church within six months. This time may be extended at the discretion of the elders when circumstances warrant. If no extension is granted and the member has not joined another church, he will be released from membership.

When a member fails to unite with a faithful Christian church and the reasons for this raise pastoral concern, the elders may apply an erasure with censure (that is, removal from the membership roll accompanied by a formal pastoral rebuke). If the situation does not warrant suspension or excommunication, or if those measures are judged to be inappropriate, the elders may instead dismiss the member with a letter of admonition or rebuke, according to the circumstances.

An erasure with censure requires the elders meeting together as a board. If such agreement is not reached, the dismissal will be a simple erasure from the membership roll.

If a member removes himself from the fellowship of the church and cannot be reached after reasonable efforts by the elders, the elders may, after an appropriate period of time, remove his name from the membership roll. Such action will be taken with pastoral concern and prayer, recognizing that the member has effectively withdrawn himself from the oversight of this church.

If a member persistently refuses the pastoral oversight of the elders, or declines to participate in the life of the church while also refusing transfer to another faithful church, the elders may remove his name from the membership roll with an accompanying letter of admonition.

Article VI – Church Government

God has ordained the institution of government, establishing distinct and legitimate spheres of rule, including the family, civil government, and the church, with Scripture commanding submission to each.

All spheres of government are subject to the Triune God, from whom their authority is derived (Rom. 13). Furthermore, Jesus Christ is uniquely the Head of the church, and as such, He has ordained that human leaders, under His authority, rule and oversee the body of the saints according to His Word (Heb. 13:17). These men are to be qualified with respect to Scripture. They are to

shepherd and rule using the Word of God as their light and standard of judgement, while also submitting to Scripture themselves.

Section 1 – Form and Nature of Government

The form of our government shall be built upon the principles and wisdom of Scripture, and the examples set forth by the apostles therein.

SHC shall be governed by a Board of Elders, within which the Senior Pastor serves as moderator. Decisions are formed through the collective counsel of the Board, with the Senior Pastor retaining responsibility for the final determination (Acts 15:1–35; 1 Tim. 5:17; Ex. 18:21-26; Num. 11:16-17).

A plurality of elders provides a multitude of counselors — men who are qualified, learned, and experienced, each possessing distinct gifts (Prov. 24:6). This structure serves to hold the Board accountable through various means, including the Senior Pastor.

Additionally, Church Officers are expected to seek the wisdom of the heads of households and congregation when necessary (Acts 6:2–5).

Thus God in His wisdom establishes real pastoral authority, orders leadership through shared authority, provides a means of wise and deliberate counsel, and ensures meaningful accountability within Christ's church.

Section 2 – The Board

The Board consists of all duly ordained elders of the church, who together bear the responsibility of oversight – including matters of doctrine, discipline, leadership, and direction. The Board will meet as regularly as necessary for the faithful oversight of the church.

Only those serving in the office of elder possess authority within the Board. The Senior Pastor serves as moderator of the Board, meaning he presides over the meetings and ensures that all matters are conducted in an orderly and *edifying* manner.

The Board must seek unity in its decisions through prayer, discussion, and submission to Scripture. When perfect unity cannot be reached, decisions will be made according to the collective judgment of the elders. The specific voting

thresholds required for various matters shall be defined in the Bylaws. A quorum shall consist of a majority of the active elders, without which no formal action shall be taken.

The proceedings of the Board will be recorded and maintained as part of the official records of the church.

The Board can refer generally to the active ordained officers, or specifically to the meetings of said officers.

Article VII – Church Officers

The two New Testament offices are Elder and Deacon. The New Testament uses Pastor, Elder, Bishop, and Shepherd, interchangeably to refer to the same office (Tit. 1:5–7).

Within the office of Elder, there exists a variety of responsibilities, as well as distinct gifts and strengths given to each man (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:4–7). Because of this Scriptural teaching, and in keeping with the practice of the Christian church, we acknowledge functional distinctions within the one office of Elder. These distinctions do not constitute separate offices, but rather reflect differing roles and emphases within the same office.

The official titles used by this local body include Senior Pastor and Associate Pastor.

Section 1 – Duties and Responsibilities of Elders

Under Christ, the pastors and elders together govern the church. Their responsibilities include ruling and shepherding (1 Pet. 5:1–2), equipping (Eph. 4:11–12), prayer and fasting (Acts 6:4; 13:1–3), teaching and preaching (1 Tim. 5:17), administering baptism and the Lord's Table (Matt. 28:19–20; 1 Cor. 11:23–26), administering church discipline and restoration (1 Cor. 5:1–5), and visiting the sick (Jas. 5:14–15).

Pastors and elders may delegate responsibilities to deacons and church staff as needed.

Although all pastors and elders share in these responsibilities, there shall be only one Senior Pastor at a time.

The Senior Pastor serves as the primary shepherd, moderating the Board as first among equals. He oversees the Board, the work of church officers, the congregation, and the ministry of the church as a whole. He must faithfully delegate responsibility and is expected to seek counsel and wisdom from the Board, the heads of households, and the congregation when necessary.

Section 2 – Duties and Responsibilities of Deacons

Deacons serve under the oversight of the pastors and elders (Acts 6:1–6). Their responsibilities include preparing and administering the annual budget, maintaining church facilities, overseeing the deacon's fund, coordinating fellowship meals, providing administrative oversight of subordinate ministries, preparing the elements for the Lord's Table, and providing general office support. Individual deacons are responsible for the duties assigned to them, as recorded in the minutes.

In the absence of deacons, the pastor(s) shall be responsible for these duties, either directly or through delegation.

Section 3 – Election and Ordination of Officers

A prospective elder or deacon may be identified by the elders, by the heads of households in the church, by members of the congregation, or may present himself for consideration.

All candidates must meet the qualifications for the office set forth in Scripture (1 Tim. 3:1–13; Tit. 1:5–9; 1 Pet. 5:2–4), and subscribe to SHC's Statement of Faith. After a reasonable and necessary period of examination and training, candidates may be approved for ordination. Approval for ordination shall be determined by the Board of Elders.

Ordination shall be performed by the laying on of hands by the elders (Acts 13:2–3; 1 Tim. 4:14, 5:22).

Upon ordination, the elder or deacon shall take the following vow:

"As God is my witness, I solemnly vow that I will serve this church faithfully as a servant of Christ, and will maintain godly order in my life and my household as the Word of God requires."

Section 4 – Staff

Sovereign Hope Church, as a result of a growing congregation, expanding ministries, or increasing responsibilities, may require additional staff to carry out various duties. These positions are distinct from the two New Testament offices of Elder and Deacon and are not to be confused with ordained leadership.

Staff positions may be either paid or unpaid. Examples of such roles include Minister of Music, Pastor's Assistant, Teacher, and Secretary.

A Pastor's Assistant is a man in training for pastoral ministry who has not yet been ordained, though responsibilities may be delegated to him as needed.

Because these roles are not ordained offices of leadership within the church, they shall not be included on the Board.

Section 5 – Resignation or Removal of Officers and Staff

Pastors, elders, or deacons may resign or take a leave of absence by submitting a letter to the elders. Upon receipt, the officer shall present his reasons to the Board. Officers should submit such a request only after a time of prayer and counsel.

At the next household meeting, the Board shall notify the men of the church that such a letter has been received. If the desire of the officer remains unchanged by the following Board meeting, the elders shall issue a statement accepting the resignation or approving the leave of absence.

If a resignation is sought for reasons of moral or doctrinal irregularity, or moral failure, it shall not serve as a substitute for any appropriate biblical discipline. Likewise, a leave of absence shall not be granted as a form of discipline.

Removal for disciplinary or moral reasons must follow Scripture, requiring proper witnesses and careful investigation (1 Tim. 5:19–20). The Board shall oversee such proceedings.

In the case of either the resignation or removal of the Senior Pastor, a replacement shall be sought with diligence and urgency. There shall be only one Senior Pastor at a time.

Section 6 – Resignation or Removal of Senior Pastor

If the Senior Pastor is resigning or retiring, and such departure is not due to moral failure, he shall, together with the Board, diligently seek a qualified man to assume the office of Senior Pastor. When possible, priority shall be given to qualified men within Sovereign Hope Church and its current leadership.

If the Senior Pastor is aware of his future departure, he is expected to provide sufficient time and training for his replacement.

The selection of a new Senior Pastor shall follow the process established for significant decisions within the church, including participation by the heads of households, careful consideration and inquiry by the Board, and unity sought through prayer and counsel, with the final determination in the hands of the Senior Pastor.

If the Senior Pastor steps down, whether voluntarily, or by removal, due to moral failure, the Board shall assume responsibility for selecting the next Senior Pastor. In such cases, the decision shall be made through prayer, counsel, and the collective judgment of the elders.

Article VIII — Meetings and Elections

Section 1 – Elections

Elections within the church shall ordinarily concern the calling of officers and other significant matters – as determined by the elders.

Ballots will include the options “Yes,” “No,” and “Abstain.” The results of all elections will be reviewed by the Board. In the case of “No” votes, the Board may make due inquiry into the reasons – as deemed appropriate – for the good of the church.

Section 2 – Elector Households

In church elections, voting is conducted by household. Those households eligible to vote shall be referred to as *elector households*.

An elector household is defined as a household in which the head of that household is a member in good standing. Independent, unmarried members in good standing shall also be considered elector households for purposes of voting.

Elector households may vote in the election of church officers, as well as in other matters determined by the elders.

The elders shall be responsible for determining and qualifying elector households. Ballots shall be distributed no less than three weeks prior to any scheduled election. Elections shall be conducted at such times as determined appropriate by the elders.

The elders shall determine and interpret household status in all cases.

Section 3 – Meetings

The elders shall call and oversee meetings of the heads of households for the conduct of church business, counsel, and communication.

These household meetings shall be held at such times as determined by the elders and shall serve as a primary means of participation, accountability, and shared counsel within the life of the church.

Only heads of households, along with independent unmarried members recognized as elector households, shall participate in matters brought before these meetings.

All such meetings shall be conducted in an orderly and edifying manner, in submission to Scripture (1 Cor. 14:40).

Article IX — Church Discipline

Discipline is meant to restore members and honor God. Formal discipline may include private warnings (Matt. 18:15), public admonishment and suspension from the Lord's Supper (2 Thess. 3:14-15), and if needed, formal hearings and excommunication (Matt. 18:17). Non-communicant members or attendees are subject to pastoral guidance but not excommunication. All formal procedures are documented and the accused has the right to respond.

Article X — Subordinate Ministries

The elders may assign leaders or boards to run subordinate ministries. Removal of leaders or separation of ministries requires the Board. All formal actions are recorded in minutes.

Article XI — Dissolution Clause

If, in the judgment of the Board, the continued operation of Sovereign Hope Church becomes no longer possible, prudent, or consistent with the faithful fulfillment of its purpose and duties before God, the Board of Elders may recommend the dissolution of the church. Such a recommendation must receive the unanimous approval of the elders, together with the approval of the Senior Pastor, who retains responsibility for the final determination in matters concerning the governance of the church. Following such approval, the matter shall be presented to the congregation at a duly called meeting announced in advance, at which a simple majority vote of the elector households shall be required for dissolution.

Upon dissolution, the elders shall oversee the orderly settlement of the church's affairs, including the payment of lawful debts and obligations, the preservation of appropriate records, and the disposition of all remaining property and assets. No property, asset, or net earnings of the church shall be distributed to the benefit of any private individual. All remaining assets and property shall be distributed exclusively to one or more faithful Christian churches, ministries, or nonprofit religious organizations that are aligned with the doctrine, purpose, and convictions of Sovereign Hope Church, as determined by the elders and Senior Pastor. SHC shall ensure that all remaining property and assets of the church are distributed to, and perpetually remain dedicated to, the worship of God, the proclamation of the Gospel, and the work of Christian ministry.

Article XII — Amendments

This Constitution and the Bylaws of the church may be amended according to the procedures established therein, respectively. In the event of any conflict between the Constitution and the Bylaws, the Constitution shall prevail.

The Constitution and Book of Confessions may be amended by a simple majority vote of the elders, after presenting the proposed changes and receiving the counsel of the heads of households, and with final approval by the Senior Pastor, who moderates the Board.

The procedures and policies of the church shall be set forth in the Bylaws.