

## **Bethesda First Baptist Church dba The Church in Bethesda Bylaws**

Revised October 21, 1990; November 22, 1992, January 28, 1996, January 25, 1998,  
May 23, 1999, February 6, 2000, October 27, 2002 and **February 21, 2010**

### **Statement of Review**

1. In 2004 the Bethesda First Baptist Church embarked on fundamental changes in congregational identity and function. At that time, in accordance with the Agreement of Trust and Partnership for the Re-Envisioning and Restart of the Church (“Restart Agreement”), the church instituted a Leadership Trustees Committee (“LT”) to oversee a “restart” period during which the congregation would de-emphasize its Baptist affiliation and identity and would move toward a non-denominational expression of its faith and practice. The congregation began doing business as The Church in Bethesda (“CiB”).
2. Under the Restart Agreement (Article IV), the then current Church membership voted to suspend the Church by-laws and to dissolve the Boards, Committees, and administrative structure of the Church and turn all authority over to the Leadership Trustees.
3. The LT functioned faithfully through a five-year process of overseeing staffing needs and asset management until the beginning of 2009. In line with the “Criteria of Success” stated in Article IX of the Restart Agreement, the LT determined that the congregation was on a healthy footing both in member participation and commitment, and in financial stability. The Leadership Trustees thus declared the restart process a success and terminated the Restart Agreement per Article VIII of that Agreement.
4. The Leadership Trustees concurrently instituted a new Church governance group called the Servants Group (“SG”) based on a consensus decision-making model and composed of members of the congregation and pastoral staff. In addition to being the new governing body of the CiB, the SG was, in effect, the Planning Committee envisioned by Article V of the restart Agreement.
5. The Restart Agreement anticipated that a new set of by-laws would be in place by the time the Restart Agreement was terminated (Article VIII). However, this not being the case, the SG agreed that the older set of congregational bylaws would be reinstated until such time as a new set of by-laws was drafted and approved by the church membership.
6. That older set of bylaws had been designed and revised to reflect a very different congregation. In an effort to reflect the identity and function of the current congregation, and to further establish its trajectory of growth and faithful presence, the SG has set forth this bylaw revision to be effective, following congregational input and discussion, on the date of congregational approval, as set forth below.

### **Governance Model and Philosophy**

#### **1. Flat Structure**

- a. In many churches a codified system of governance is developed around a hierarchal structure and the pursuit of centralized power controlled by voting practices. We have chosen to construct a flat governance model that enables us to decentralize authority, bringing the whole congregation into the process of discovering and implementing ministry visions.

## **2. Transparency**

- b. In furtherance of our congregation's spiritual growth and leadership accountability, we are committed to a high level of transparency. Meetings of the SG are not closed and members of CiB are welcome to attend. Exceptions to the open meeting model may be made to protect personal confidentiality. Such exceptions would include: 1) when it is necessary for the SG to discuss the personal details of a member's life for the purpose of planning and implementing a ministry response and spiritual direction; and 2) when personnel matters are discussed by the SG, staff members, family of staff, and non-SG members should not be present. Other exceptions should be made very sparingly and only after prayerful discussion by the SG.

## **Servants Group**

### **1. Consensus**

- a. The SG is committed to building a relational community. To further this goal we are choosing to implement a consensus model of decision-making versus a voting model. This model mandates sharing, an extreme commitment to communication, speaking and listening. Consensus is a process of building unanimity. Voting creates winners and losers. Consensus enables us to build and foster relationships while making decisions. Voting too often produces decisions at the expense of relationships.
- b. Most smaller decisions that have to do with the day to day maintenance of the church campus and facilities can be reached by the SG finding consensus. When larger issues are raised the SG will bring the necessary facts and questions to the whole congregation for maximum input and participation. The SG may then collect that input and reach a consensus position.
- c. When any issues or questions arise that require congregational participation by either the bylaws or constitution, then the SG will call a congregational meeting. The congregation will be notified of the meeting as far in advance as possible and will be given all necessary information to participate.

### **2. Participation**

- a. Participation in the Servants Group is voluntary and an individual may seek that participation or be invited to participate. Members of the SG are those who have made a commitment to serve the congregation for at least one year. Members of the SG are encouraged to take a break after two continuous years of service. The primary qualification of an individual to serve on the SG is a willingness to listen and work with the group to address all concerns and build unanimity of action and purpose.

### **3. Officers and Group Functions**

- a. Members of the SG may at times be asked to fill certain roles or offices as needed for conducting the business of the congregation. Any member of the SG consenting to fill a needed role for church business recognizes that they are a functional extension of the SG and operating in accordance with our consensus.

## **Membership and Participation**

1. Membership has long been established in the constitution of the congregation. The only revisions to be made to the process of recognizing our current members is to recognize the validity of our “Membership Affirmation” document through which individuals and families may formalize and make known their intent to participate with our church family at dependable levels of attendance and support. When an individual or family has signed this document the SG welcomes and recognizes them as participating members of any congregational meeting or process. We will hold their intent to be identified as members of CiB until such a time as they signify in writing a withdrawal of that commitment.
2. We also recognize that there are always some who are not comfortable with a membership process or signifying any documentation involved in that process. We respect the dignity and conscience of these sisters and brothers, and will always welcome everyone to whole-hearted participation in our worship gatherings, church events and programs. We will, however, need to make a distinction between members, as defined herein and in the constitution, and non-members when meeting for congregational business or calling members to participate with the SG since such participation in our consensus process is predicated on a certain level of shared commitment.

## **Budgeting and Assets**

1. The SG will oversee the annual budgeting of the congregation. In furtherance of this responsibility they may at any time authorize and/or disband ministry teams comprised of CiB members to meet budgeting goals and needs.
2. For the sake of transparency, disclosure and accountability, any and all decisions to purchase, sell or mortgage or otherwise create a lien upon congregation-owned real estate holdings, or other assets of significant value, should be vetted through the entire congregation. The congregation should be given ample time to receive information, process and ask questions as to the disposition of such assets or real estate holdings, before any action is taken by the SG. At least four weeks is deemed adequate to inform the congregation of such intentions and to gather their opinions and concerns. If needed, a congregational meeting may be called to address those questions and concerns.
3. When mortgaging or selling church-owned property or assets, or entering into a lien/loan agreement with a banking institution, the SG may delegate tasks and responsibilities to, and later disband, such ministry teams comprised of SG and CiB members as needed. The SG will also designate at least three signatories from within the SG to represent the congregation in banking documentation for a term of at least one year, but no more than five years.
4. To expedite the weekly accounting responsibilities and bill payments, the SG authorizes the Senior Pastor to act as a signatory for the congregational checking account and to use a checking account debit card. The Senior Pastor is accountable to the SG and congregation in these duties. Unbudgeted capital expenses and large purchases of materials and/or services should be discussed with the SG before being made.
5. Fiscal year is the calendar year beginning January 1<sup>st</sup> of each year.

6. The Senior Pastor will retain the services and oversee the work of a bookkeeper or accountant to maintain the financial records of the church and to provide regular financial reports to the SG. In the interest of transparency and accountability, any SG member may request information directly from or meet with the church's bookkeeper or accountant. The SG will look to the church's accountant for all necessary budget, spending and bank reporting.

## **Senior Pastor**

### **1. Position**

The Senior Pastor shall be a ministry-qualified person called by CiB and directly overseen and cared for by the SG. The SG may also appoint, empower and disband any ministry teams comprised of CiB members to implement this responsibility as needed. Examples of such teams might include a Search Committee for finding a Senior Pastor or a Pastor Care Team. A decision to hire or terminate the employment of a Senior Pastor should be a consensus decision made by the SG after a congregational meeting to address concerns and questions.

### **2. Duties**

The Senior Pastor is responsible for teaching, leading, following and empowering members of CiB in the implementation of ministry visions that grow from the congregational mission to be "followers of Jesus Christ" and "good neighbors in the world."

### **3. Compensation**

All issues of compensation and employment benefits will be determined by the SG, commensurate with the duties and abilities of the Senior Pastor. Senior Pastors may or may not operate under a contractual agreement as employment in the State of Maryland is considered a voluntary arrangement and may be legally terminated by either party at any time. In the event of resignation or termination, the SG will determine appropriate levels of any severance package to assist in relocation and a smooth transition to other employment.

## **Associate Pastoral Staff**

### **1. Hiring and Dismissal**

It will be the prerogative of the SG to undertake Associate Pastoral hiring as is necessary for the completion of the congregation's ministry visions. Associate Pastoral Staff are accountable to the Senior Pastor on a day-to-day basis, ultimately responsible to the SG. The SG may also dismiss Associate Pastoral Staff when budgetary or performance concerns call for such action.

### **2. Positions**

Associate Pastoral Staff positions may include, but are not limited to an Associate Pastor, a Children's Ministry Director, a Music Director or Youth Pastor.

## **Congregational Support Staff**

1. Support Staff for administrative and organizational duties may be hired and dismissed by the SG as needed.

## **Nursery School**

1. The Bethesda First Baptist Cooperative Nursery School, now operating as the Bethesda Cooperative Nursery School (“BCNS”), is a long-standing ministry of our congregation to the Bethesda community. We affirm its mission and intent to provide a safe place for our neighbors to pursue their children’s early personal and educational development.
2. **Director**
  - a. The position of BCNS Director will, when possible, also continue in the historic intent and practice of the congregation to fill a dual need, that of the directing both the BCNS and the congregation’s other education ministries. The intent is to further all avenues of partnership and communication between the church and BCNS.
  - b. The Director of BCNS will be accountable to the Senior Pastor in daily operational concerns dealing with the church campus and scheduling. The Director is responsible to the Nursery School Committee (“NSC”) in all matters. The NCS is responsible for finding, placing and dismissing the BCNS Director, handling all employment issues and annual reviews.
3. **Nursery School Committee**
  - a. The Nursery School Committee will continue with the historic tradition of being an extension of the CiB congregation. All members of the NSC will be active, identified participants with CiB.
  - b. The NSC operates as an extension of the SG. In decision-making circumstances the NSC is to follow the consensus process modeled by the SG, and NSC decisions should be affirmed by the SG.

## **Corporate Seal**

1. For the purpose of identification and legal documentation the congregation adopts as a new logo and corporate seal the three candles with “Church in Bethesda .org” represented below.



## **Amendments and Revisions**

1. Future amendments and revisions to the bylaws will be put forth by the SG and affirmed by the congregation, in writing, at a congregational meeting called for that purpose. The CiB membership should be notified of the meeting and given all documents needed to facilitate informed participation at least two weeks before the meeting.
2. Congregational meetings for the purpose of amendments to the church bylaws should be conducted in a consensus format as modeled by the SG, and represent at least a half of the current members. Signed letters of affirmation for revisions should reflect that at least half of the current members are affirming the changes.