

CONSTITUTION
West Main Baptist Church, Danville, VA
As Amended and Approved
[DATE OF ADOPTION]

PREAMBLE

We hereby establish this Constitution to set forth our congregation's identity, mission, and foundational beliefs and to provide for the orderly continuation of our community life of faith, under the leadership and grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

ARTICLE I

NAME

This congregation shall be called West Main Baptist Church, Danville, VA.

ARTICLE II

OUR IDENTITY AND MISSION

We are a family practicing the grace and wisdom of Jesus Christ. We joyfully minister to the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of life-seeking people. We celebrate the rich diversity of our members, and we gladly invite others to join us in service to Christ.

Our love of God and our love for one another binds us together. We acknowledge that life in Christian community is sometimes difficult, often joyful, always a journey in which we walk together in mutual care, whatever comes.

We understand active Christian life means following Jesus through serving others. We seek to help each member find meaningful ways to live out their Christian faith by affirming uniquely ordained spiritual gifts and by blessing ordinary personal skills and attributes.

ARTICLE III

OUR FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS

This, our communal statement of beliefs, is offered in humility, acknowledging our own frailties and limited experience, and with our best understanding of the Holy Scriptures and the traditions and practices of our Christian faith. We respect the right of individuals within this congregation to interpret Scriptures and to determine their personal faith as God leads them. Likewise, we recognize the right of other churches to interpret these teachings and practices as they see fit. Thereby, the following statements are offered to serve as a guide for teaching and preaching and for living life together within this community.

1. God: Mystery of One, Revealed in Three

We believe in God.

Although God is a holy mystery, beyond our full comprehension, we believe that:

- There is one living and true God;
- God is the Creator and source of all life;
- God is love and continuously reaches out to us in love; and
- God provides a path of hope and restoration for every person and for our world.

We believe in Jesus Christ.

We believe that Jesus is Emmanuel - God with us, and that:

- Jesus lived on earth as both fully human and fully divine;
- Jesus was sent by God to be our Teacher, Savior and Lord;
- Jesus reveals to us who God is and leads us into a relationship with God;
- Jesus teaches us how to live our lives well, at peace with God and with each other; and
- Jesus makes a way for us to enter abundant and eternal life.

We believe in the Spirit.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, and that:

- The Spirit is God's active presence in the world;
- The Spirit breathed life into creation and continues to breathe life into our lives, the church, and our world;
- The Spirit reveals God's truth and guides God's people; and
- The Spirit works to restore a fallen world to God's perfect intention for all creation and calls us to participate in this sacred work.

2. The Bible: The Written Witness

We believe that:

- The Bible is inspired by God, written by and for God's people;
- The Bible records the historical encounters between God and humankind, including God's covenants with God's people in both the Old and New Testaments;
- The Bible reveals the truth about God, humankind, and the wider creation;
- The Bible guides us towards faith in Jesus Christ and is best understood in light of the ultimate revelation of God in Jesus Christ; and
- The Bible needs no interpreter other than the Holy Spirit and that, together in Christian community, believers seek to study, understand and follow its teachings.

3. Salvation: Trusting God in this Life and in the Life to Come

We believe that:

- Salvation is the gift of God's grace, freely offered to all people;
- Salvation is reconciliation with God and with others, both in this life and into eternity;
- Salvation is possible because of God's unconditional love and forgiveness, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the transformative work of the Holy Spirit; and
- Salvation is personal as God leads us to a moment of both recognizing our need for God and accepting God's love for us and as God guides us in a life-long progression of maturing faith.

4. The Church: The Community of Christ Followers

We affirm that we understand, follow, and serve God best in community. Therefore, we believe Jesus calls his followers to live in community, known as the Church, and that:

- The Church is both the world-wide unity of all people who share faith in Jesus and a local community of people joined by their faith in Christ and their love for one another;
- The Church exists to share God's love with the world and to guide people toward faith in Jesus Christ; and
- The Church meets regularly to worship God, to study the way of Jesus, to offer love, support and belonging to one another, and to serve a world in need.

5. Baptism and the Lord's Supper: Bearing Witness to Our Faith

We give public witness to our faith in Jesus Christ through Baptism. We believe that:

- Baptism is a symbol of dying to self and being raised to new life in Christ and
- Baptism follows a personal decision to follow Jesus and to be a part of his Church, and that this decision should never be forced or coerced.

We regularly participate in the Lord's Supper as a communal act of remembering, celebrating and proclaiming the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We believe that:

- The Lord's Supper utilizes the elements of bread and cup to remember the sacrifice of Jesus' physical body and blood, to give thanks for the gift of God's grace and to renew our commitment to follow the way of Jesus and
- The Lord's Supper is open to all, and we invite anyone who loves Jesus to participate.

6. Mercy and Justice: Joining God's Work in the World

God calls us to works of mercy and justice in this world for all people. Focusing on what unites us, we come together as a congregation to perform works of mercy that alleviate immediate needs of human distress, whatever the causes of that distress. Respecting our differences in matters of public conscience, ethics, and practice, we encourage our members to be true to their own best understanding of God's justice as they serve through the wide variety of political, social, and professional organizations which operate outside of West Main's own ministries.

7. Our Baptist Heritage: Free to Follow*

We welcome all persons to join this community of faith regardless of their denominational, religious, or non-religious background. Our history and polity are rooted in the Baptist tradition, which affirms:

Bible Freedom: We affirm that the Bible, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, must be central in the life of the individual and church and that Christians, with the best and most scholarly tools of inquiry, are both free and obligated to study and obey Scripture.

Soul Freedom: We affirm that God creates each person with the capacity to relate directly with God, to read and understand scripture, and to live authentically according to his or her own faith experience. We affirm that it is the right and responsibility of every person to relate with God and to work out his or her own faith, without the imposition of creed, the interference of clergy, or the intervention of civil government.

Church Freedom: We affirm that local churches are free, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, to determine their membership and leadership, to order their worship and work, to ordain whom they perceive as gifted for ministry, male or female, and to participate in the larger body of Christ, of whose unity and mission we are proudly a part.

Religious Freedom: We affirm religious liberty for all people without discrimination. This includes freedom *of* religion, freedom *for* religion, and freedom *from* religion.

*Source: Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*, 1993.

ARTICLE IV

THE CHURCH COVENANT

Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and to unite in community as West Main Baptist Church, we do now in the presence of God, voluntarily and joyfully enter into covenant with one another to:

Center our lives, both personally and communally, on Jesus Christ; seek Jesus together and let his life and Spirit guide us in everything we do and decide.

Receive people as they are so that we all can become who God intends us to be; offer support and encouragement to each other; be genuine, authentic, and trustworthy in our relationships; and walk through life together in Christian love.

Contribute our unique gifts to strengthen this church, our community, and the work of God in the world; help each individual find meaningful ways to live out their faith by serving others; and give generously and cheerfully to support the ministry, missions, and expenses of this church.

Maintain community with one another by choosing to focus on what unites us, while respecting our differences; be slow to take offense and readily practice forgiveness; and joyfully cooperate with each other for the general good of the church.

Meet together regularly for worship, study, fellowship, and prayer; bear witness to Jesus Christ, perform acts of mercy that alleviate human distress, and seek the transformation of our community and our world.

ARTICLE V

CHURCH GOVERNANCE

We affirm our congregation's right to determine its own membership, to call its own clergy, and to establish its own rule of life together, in keeping with the identity, mission, and foundational beliefs which our Constitution describes. Our principal document of church governance shall be contained in bylaws adopted by our congregation in a special called business meeting for that purpose.

ARTICLE VI

AMENDMENTS TO THIS CONSTITUTION

The church, acting in a special called business meeting for the purpose, may by a two-thirds majority vote to amend this constitution. Notice of the meeting shall be published in the church newsletter for four consecutive weeks prior to the meeting including either the text of the amendment(s) or how they may be requested or accessed by church members. Notice of the meeting and how the text of the amendment(s) may be requested or accessed shall be made during four consecutive Sunday worship services prior to the meeting.

A two-thirds majority vote shall be counted from among all members present and voting at the special called business meeting. Absentee voting is disallowed.