

# **First Baptist Church Constitution**

## **OUR CHURCH COVENANT**

Having been led by the Holy Spirit to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, and on the public confession of our faith, having been immersed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God and this assembly, solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

We purpose, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to attend its services regularly; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrines; to give it a sacred preeminence over all institutions of human origin; to give faithfully of time and talent in its activities; to contribute cheerfully and regularly, as God has prospered us, to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spreading of the Gospel throughout all nations.

We also purpose to maintain family and private devotions; to train our children according to the Word of God; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to live according to the will of God, taking every opportunity to serve Him; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our conduct; to avoid all gossip, backbiting, and unrighteous anger; to abstain from all forms of activity which dishonors our Lord Jesus Christ, cause stumbling to a fellow believer or hinder the winning of a soul to Christ; to be zealous in our efforts to advance the cause of Christ, our Savior; and to give Him preeminence in all things.

We further purpose to encourage one another in the blessed hope of our Lord's return; to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember each other in prayer; to aid each other in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Savior, to seek it without delay.

We moreover purpose that when we remove from this place we will as soon as possible unite with some other church of like faith and order where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word. In the event there is no such church, we shall seek, with the Lord's help, to establish one.

## **OUR DISTINCTIVES**

**Believer's Baptism by Immersion**  
**A Regenerated Church Membership**  
**Priesthood of All Believers**  
**The Scriptures as the Sole Authority**  
**Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures**  
**Salvation by Grace, Blood, and Faith**  
**The Demands of Discipleship**

**Individual Liberty and Responsibility**  
**Democratic Form of Government**  
**Eternal Security of the Believer**  
**Autonomy of the Local Church**  
**Lordship of Jesus Christ**  
**Separation of Church and State**

# CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH ST. JOHNS, MICHIGAN, CLINTON COUNTY

As Revised, Rewritten and Adopted

## ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION

### Article I - NAME

The name of the corporation and by which it shall be know in law is: THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF ST. JOHNS, MICHIGAN.

### Article II - PURPOSE

The purpose and purposes of this corporation hereinafter referred to as the church shall be: The maintaining of public worship, the study and teaching of the Bible, the preaching and teaching of the Gospel of Christ, the administration of the New Testament ordinances, the spiritual improvement of its members, the saving of the lost, and to exert as far as possible a Christian and moral influence in the community and a missionary spirit and testimony in the world at large.

### Article III - RELATIONSHIPS

#### **Sec. 1**

The church shall be a law unto itself as to qualifications for membership, discipline of its members, and all rules governing its own proceedings, affiliations and policies and answerable only to its Great Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **Sec. 2**

The church shall not become a part of, or affiliated with any organization or association except by two-thirds majority vote by ballot of qualified voting members present at the meeting when the proposed union is presented. Previous notice of said proposal having been placed in the hands of active members of the church in clearly typed or printed form at least ten days prior to said meeting.

### Article IV - PERIOD

The time for which the church shall be created shall be without end.

### Article V - AMENDMENTS

These Articles of Association may be amended at any annual meeting of the church by proceeding according to the provisions of Act No. 327 P.A. of the State of Michigan, for the year of 1931, and by two-thirds majority vote by ballot after suggested change or amendment has been placed in the hands of active members of the church in clearly typed or printed form at least ten days prior to said annual meeting.

## **OUR CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS PREAMBLE**

Reposing our faith wholly in the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation, believing in the teachings and practices of Baptists and in those great distinctive principles for which they have ever stood, namely:

1. The preeminence of Christ as our Divine Lord and Master.
2. The supreme authority of the Bible and its sufficiency as our only rule of faith and practice.
3. The right of private interpretation and the competency of the individual soul in direct approach to God.
4. The absolute separation of church and state.
5. A regenerate church membership.

6. The beautiful symbolic ordinance of believer's baptism in obedience to the command of Christ.
7. The complete independence of the local church and its interdependence in associated fellowship with other churches of like precious faith.
8. The solemn obligation of majority rule, guaranteeing equal rights to all and special privileges to none.
9. The spiritual unity of all believers, for which the Lord so earnestly prayed.
10. A world-wide program of missionary fervor and evangelism in obedience to the command of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Further, accepting the general summary of doctrines and duties of the church covenant, we, therefore, band ourselves together as a body of baptized believers in Jesus Christ, and adopt for our government, plan of worship, and service, the following articles:

### **Article I - MISSION STATEMENT**

The First Baptist Church of St. Johns exists to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ by exalting Him in worship, evangelizing the lost in our community and around the world, edifying believers through the ministry of the Word, and equipping the saints for the work of service.

### **Article II - GOVERNMENT**

The government of this church shall be vested in the body of believers who compose it. The church shall be subject to the control of no other ecclesiastical body and shall recognize no higher authority, except that of our Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the church, but shall be free to cooperate with other churches of like precious faith.

### **Article III - CHURCH FELLOWSHIP**

#### **Sec. 1**

The church recommends and accepts the following as the logical sequence of church fellowship:

1. Salvation: Confession of faith in Jesus Christ.
2. Baptism: Testimony of union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection; and identification with other believers.
3. Communion: Fellowship with Christ and his people by partaking of the Lord's Supper.
4. Membership: Serving Christ through the work of the local church.

#### **Sec. 2**

Any person professing saving Faith in Jesus Christ giving evidence of a change of heart, adopting the views of faith, doctrine, and practice held by this church, and being immersed in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; may be received into membership upon recommendation by the pastoral staff and deacons, subject to the approval of the church.

#### **Sec. 3**

Any person desiring baptism shall make it known to a pastor, who shall provide for proper instruction and make arrangements for administering the ordinance.

#### **Sec. 4**

A person may be baptized when he gives evidence that he has been saved and has been properly instructed in the meaning and significance of immersion.

#### **Sec. 5**

Anyone desiring to join the church shall be asked to read our Doctrinal Statement, Church Covenant, and Constitution and to accept it and its responsibilities.

#### **Sec. 6**

The pastors and deacons shall examine all applicants for church membership.

**Sec. 7**

Anyone may become a member of the church after he has been saved, baptized and matures enough to properly understand and accept the responsibilities of the Church Covenant and Constitution.

**Article IV - DUTIES OF MEMBERS****Sec. 1**

It is the duty of members to honor, esteem and love their pastors, to pray for them daily, to support them in the scriptural exercise of their pastoral duties, to regularly attend scheduled services, to manifest a tender regard for their reputation and contribute toward their support in proportion to each one's ability.

**Sec. 2**

It is the duty of every member to cultivate and to cherish Christian love for each other, to visit and sympathize with those in affliction and to pray for each other tenderly. If necessary, members are to affectionately and privately admonish one another in their faults and improprieties and strive by all to promote each other's spiritual benefits and well-being.

**Sec. 3**

Members shall endeavor to preserve the unity of the church and, if at any time they find themselves opposed to the fundamental doctrines of this church, or, if for any reason are unable to harmonize with others, they will not seek to disrupt its fellowship but will quietly withdraw themselves from its membership.

**Sec. 4**

It is the duty of every member to bear faithful and prudent testimony against every form of evil practice, to be exact in fulfilling obligations and promises, to live in a peaceful and neighborly manner, to perform acts of kindnesses and charity, set an example of honesty and generosity and, as opportunity and ability may enable, to commend the Gospel of Jesus Christ, testifying to its power and grace.

**Sec. 5**

It is the duty of all members to regularly attend the services of the church when able, and to systematically give to the financial support of the church program "as the Lord prospers". Non-resident members are to maintain their financial support of the church according to their ability, and to attend as many services as possible.

**Article V - DISMISSAL OF MEMBERS****Sec. 1**

Any member of good standing is entitled at any time to a letter of transfer of membership with which to unite with a church of like precious faith and order. When uniting with a different kind of church, a letter of recommendation will be given. All church letters shall be authorized by the deacons and sent by the church clerk. Church letters are sent directly to the church with which they desire to unite, but letters are not granted to persons to carry or keep in their possession.

**Sec. 2**

Any member who shall not attend at least two regularly scheduled services of the church during a six month period, without giving a satisfactory reason to the pastors and deacons, shall be dropped from the membership rolls of the church. The deacons shall review the rolls at their regular deacon's meetings in April and October.

**Sec. 3**

Any member who is guilty of serious misconduct and who persists in the same, after due admonition of the pastors and deacons, may be dismissed by the unanimous consent of the deacons.

We are always to keep in mind the exhortation of Gal. 6:1, *"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."*

## **Article VI - OFFICERS**

### **Sec. 1**

There are two scriptural officers in a New Testament church: pastors (elders, bishops) and deacons (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 5:17; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1).

### **Sec. 2**

This church shall endeavor to maintain at least one pastor and seven deacons.

### **Sec. 3**

Candidates for the scriptural offices of pastor and deacon must have the approval of the pastoral staff and deacons. An associate pastor is considered in the same manner as a pastor.

### **Sec. 4**

All church officers, committee members, and regularly assigned teachers must be members of the church and exemplify Christian conduct.

### **Sec. 5**

Any member of a committee or officer of the church who shall absent himself from three regularly announced meetings in succession, without an acceptable reason given to such committee or pastor, shall be considered in default of his duties. The nominating committee shall be asked by the deacons to present the name of a candidate to the congregation for the purpose of filling such vacancy.

### **Sec. 6**

The election of all church officers shall occur at the annual meeting in January, and they shall assume office immediately. Officers elected during the year shall take office immediately, or as stated by the church.

## **Article VII - DUTIES OF OFFICERS**

### **A - PASTORS**

#### **Sec. 1**

A pastor is called by a three-fourths vote of the church and continues as long as both parties are agreed.

#### **Sec. 2**

A pastor shall perform such duties as are scripturally incumbent upon his office. He shall be the shepherd of the flock, overseer of the work of God, spiritual leader, teacher of the unsearchable riches of Christ and shall lead the church in a worldwide missionary endeavor.

#### **Sec. 3**

The senior pastor shall be the moderator of the church and a member of all committees, but he shall have the privilege of appointing another as moderator or committee member in his place, whenever he so desires.

#### **Sec. 4**

The pastors shall extend the right hand of fellowship to all new members on behalf of the church, administer the ordinances and perform such other duties as generally appertain to such a position.

#### **Sec. 5**

The pastors shall visit the sick, and with members of the deacons, make inquiry of those who neglect the assembling of themselves with the church and those who are guilty of misconduct and who persist in the same.

#### **Sec. 6**

A Pastor shall accept our Doctrinal Statement and shall exemplify daily Christian conduct as set forth in the Scriptures.

**Sec. 7**

When determining the calling of a pastor or determining whether one should continue as pastor, the church shall be called into a special business meeting for that purpose. This meeting shall be called by the deacons and notice shall be given by public announcement during the Sunday services on the two preceding Sundays. A Pastor, when resigning, shall give the church one month notice; and the church, when dismissing a pastor, must give him one month notice, unless a different period of time is agreed upon by both parties. When accused of apostasy, heresy, or departure from the doctrines of the church, he shall be given a fair and proper hearing and, if convicted, shall be dismissed at once.

**Sec. 8**

The Pastors' salaries and benefits shall be determined by a vote of the church. All vacations and other absences shall be arranged with the deacons. He shall be permitted to attend conferences which will be especially helpful to his ministry and meetings in which the church and its affairs have a part. Expense allowance shall be determined by the deacons or the church.

**Sec. 9**

He will be allowed to conduct services in other churches but not to exceed six weeks out of any church year except by special vote of the church. In his absence, filling the pulpit will be his responsibility.

**Sec. 10**

When the church deems necessary, one may be called to assist the senior pastor. He shall be directly responsible to the senior pastor. His responsibilities shall be determined by the senior pastor and deacons.

**B - DEACONS****Sec. 1**

Following the example of the early church at Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-3) at least seven men (male) fulfilling scriptural qualifications should be selected from the congregation. If seven scriptural qualified men cannot be found a lesser number should be chosen. They shall serve for a term of two years and be subject for re-election for one more term. A year must elapse before he can be elected again to that office. Half the number of deacons should be elected in one year and the other half on the alternate year. In the event one is chosen to a partial term, he shall not serve more than two additional terms in succession.

**Sec. 2**

The deacons are to concern themselves with THE MINISTRY of the church. They are to assist the pastors in promoting the spiritual welfare of the church, in organizing and developing the church for the best possible service, in making proper provisions for the observance of the ordinances of the church, in serving the elements of the Lord's Supper, in visiting and doing personal work and in considering the applicants for church membership.

**Sec. 3**

They are to actively engage in all the spiritual work of the church, visit those that need assistance and administer alms to those in need.

**Sec. 4**

The deacons are to consider the needs of the pastors, review their status once a year, shortly before the annual meeting, and supervise their remuneration and those working directly under them. They are to recommend gifts and remunerations for guest speakers.

**Sec. 5**

They shall cooperate with the pastors in providing the pulpit supply and leaders of the prayer meeting in his absence. In case of a vacancy occurring in the pastorate, the deacons immediately constitute a pulpit committee, which shall secure supplies for the pulpit, and shall recommend to the church a candidate for the vacant pastorate.

**Sec. 6**

The deacons shall be responsible to question candidates for the pulpit regarding doctrines, practices, and affiliations, in advance of the time of voting upon the candidate by the church. The deacon chairman shall read the recommendation to the congregation.

**Sec. 7**

When in the judgment of the deacons a man in this membership is called to the Christian ministry, it shall be within the power of the deacons to call a council for ordination, provided such a call is approved by the vote of the congregation. The ordination council shall examine the candidate as to his conversion, his call to the ministry, his doctrinal beliefs, and upon recommendation of the council, shall ordain such a man to the Gospel ministry.

**Sec. 8**

The deacons shall meet at least once a month at a time and date agreed upon by themselves and the pastors. They shall elect their own chairman who shall serve as vice-moderator of their meetings and business meetings when there is a vacancy in the pastorate.

**Sec. 9**

The deacons shall acquaint themselves with the laws of Michigan pertaining to churches and church properties and see that the church faithfully complies therein. They shall make recommendations to the church concerning needed improvements, but necessary and emergency repairs are to be cared for whenever needed.

**Sec. 10**

They are to be responsible for the safe keeping of all titles, deeds, and official documents of the church. They are to represent the church in all legal matters and execute all contracts, mortgages, trusts and other instruments of indebtedness as the church so instructs. The title of all property, however, shall be vested in the name of the church.

**Sec. 11**

The deacons are to determine the insurance company and keep all church property properly insured. They shall take all necessary measures for its protection and upkeep in cooperation with the will of the church.

**Sec. 12**

They shall be authorized to hire and supervise the necessary people to take care of the maintenance and upkeep of the church buildings and property. They shall recommend the salaries to the church for approval.

**Sec. 13**

The deacons shall be responsible for making ready the buildings for services.

**Sec. 14**

They shall be responsible for all money coming through the church, seeing that it is carefully handled and properly spent.

**C - MISSIONS COMMITTEE****Sec. 1**

The church shall endeavor to maintain at least nine members on the missions committee. Any expansion is to be approved by the church. A pastor (selected by the pastoral staff), and a deacon member chosen by the deacons are members of the missions committee; all other committee members, including not less than two men and three women, are selected by the nominating committee and voted upon by the church membership.

**Sec. 2**

Terms shall be three years in duration. No one shall serve more than two successive terms. In the event one is chosen to a partial term, he shall not serve more than two additional terms in succession.

**Sec. 3**

The missions committee members shall elect their own chairman who shall moderate their meetings.

**Sec. 4**

They shall concern themselves with missionary work and endeavor to COORDINATE the entire missionary program of the church. They are expected to meet with prospective missionary candidates.

**Sec. 5**

The Committee members are to PROMOTE missions through all the ministries of the church.

**Sec. 6**

They shall assist the pastors by writing to missionaries to learn of their needs and arranging missionary visits, speakers and conferences. They are therefore to COMMUNICATE information between missionaries, the pastoral staff and the church.

**Sec. 7**

They are to recommend an annual missions budget and any changes in missionary commitments to the deacons for presentation to the church.

**D - CHURCH CLERK**

**Sec. 1**

The church clerk shall be appointed annually by the pastors and deacons and shall keep a correct record of the proceedings of the church, baptisms and members. He shall issue letters and certificates as directed by the deacons or church, conduct all official correspondence, preserve all documents, papers and letters coming into his hands during the term of office and deliver the same to the successor and keep an account of any special events in the life of the church which are of historical interest and value.

**Sec. 2**

The clerk shall make a full report to the church at the annual business meeting and at such times as the church may require.

**E - TREASURER**

**Sec. 1**

The treasurer shall be appointed annually by the pastors and deacons, and is responsible for the financial record keeping of the church. It is his responsibility to oversee the financial committee (treasurer, financial secretary, and counters) as they carry out their duties. He shall be empowered to write checks as outlined by the budget, deacons, staff and the church.

**Sec. 2**

A secretary shall be hired to carry out the day to day financial responsibilities. She shall write checks, as authorized, keep a record of all transactions, submit a monthly report to the treasurer and deacons and record giving of the people for annual statements.

**Sec. 3**

The treasurer shall make full reports to the church at quarterly and annual business meetings and at such other times as the church may require.

**Article IX - MEETINGS AND COMMITTEES**

**Sec. 1**

The church year shall run from January through December. The quarterly business meetings shall be held on the third Wednesday of April, July, and October. The annual meeting shall be held on the third Wednesday of January, public announcement of which must be made on the two previous Sundays.

**Sec. 2**

Special business meetings of the church may be called by the pastoral staff or at the call of the deacons as any special occasion may require, but public announcement must be made in at least two regular Sunday preaching services just prior to the said meeting and all reasonable effort made to inform all qualified voters.

**Sec. 3**

Communion Services shall be held on the first Sunday of every month unless changed by the pastors and deacons.

**Sec. 4**

The pastors and deacons shall recommend to the church the appointment of all needed committees for each church year.

**Sec. 5**

The budget committee shall meet before the annual meeting and on the basis of information received from the deacons and committees shall recommend to the church a budget for each church year.

**Sec. 6**

A nominating committee shall be established as follows: the pastoral staff, two deacons chosen by the deacons, and two members elected by the congregation. To determine the two elected members the congregation will be asked to submit names to the pastoral staff and deacons one month prior to the October quarterly business meeting. All qualified persons will be placed on a ballot for election at the October meeting. The nominating committee shall act for a period of one year and until a successive committee is elected. They shall nominate officers to be elected by the church.

**Sec. 7**

Any member of a committee or officer of the church who shall absent himself from three regularly announced meetings in succession, without an acceptable reason given to such committees shall be considered in default of his duties. The nominating committee shall present a candidate to the congregation to fill such vacancy or in the case of committee members, the pastoral staff and deacons shall recommend new members to fill the vacancies.

**Article X - BYLAWS**

- (1) The financial policy of the church and all its auxiliaries shall be personal, voluntary giving, and no socials, suppers, entertainments, etc. shall be for the purpose of raising money.
- (2) All church and auxiliary business meetings shall begin with the reading of Scripture and Prayer.
- (3) The Word of God is precious and needs to be easily comprehended by the majority of people. In light of this, we insist that a reliable translation (no paraphrases) be used in all the services and teaching ministries of the church.
- (4) It is recognized that a Baptist Church is a democracy in which the majority rules, but the minority has a right to private opinions in all matters locally and the right to appeal in a constitutional manner; but they shall not have the right to engage in any activity which might disturb the peace and spirituality of the church.
- (5) A majority vote by ballot of all qualified members present shall be necessary to elect officers and enact business.
- (6) Approval for the acceptance of absentee ballots must be given by the church prior to each specified business meeting.
- (7) All members must not be less than eighteen years of age to qualify for voting privileges.
- (8) The church is the final authority in all cases of question.
- (9) All bylaws or parts thereof heretofore passed but not included in these bylaws are hereby repealed.

These articles and bylaws may be amended or changed at any regular business meeting of the church by two-thirds majority of qualified members present, previous notice having been given in writing two Sundays prior to said meeting.