



*Riverside*  
BAPTIST CHURCH

# Constitution

(Approved: 11/1/20)

# Constitution of Riverside Baptist Church

of New Port Richey, FL

*Adopted by the membership on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020*

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## **Preamble**

Since it pleased Almighty God, by His Holy Spirit, to call certain of His servants to unite here under the name Riverside Baptist Church of New Port Richey, FL for the worship of God and the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and He has sustained and prospered this work to the present day; and

Whereas we, the members of Riverside Baptist Church, having searched the Scriptures under the guidance of His Spirit, have recognized the need to constitute ourselves in conformity to His will for the Church in this age;

Now therefore we, the members of Riverside Baptist Church, do hereby organize ourselves and adopt this Constitution as our articles of governance, to be interpreted at all times to reflect the character of and bring glory to Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Bible and articulated in the standards set forth in the Statement of Faith (The Baptist Faith and Message 2000) and Covenant (Article 11) of this church.

## **Article 1 – Name**

The name of this church is Riverside Baptist Fellowship Inc., doing ministry as Riverside Baptist Church.

## **Article 2 – Purpose**

This church exists by the grace of God, for the glory of God, which shall be the ultimate purpose in all its activities.

This church glorifies God by loving Him and joyfully obeying His commands through: worshipping Him; equipping the saints through Bible instruction and study; proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ through preaching and personal evangelism, and any other means consistent with the teachings of Holy Scripture; encouraging, supporting, and participating in missions work, local, domestic, and international; administering the ordinances of baptism and communion; encouraging Biblical fellowship among believers; and serving other individuals, families, and churches by providing for physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, in the name of Jesus Christ.

## **Article 3 – Membership**

### **Section 1 – Qualifications**

To qualify for membership in this church, a person must be a believer in Jesus Christ who gives evidence of regeneration, who has been baptized (immersed), in obedience to Christ, following his or her regeneration, and who wholeheartedly believes in the Christian faith as revealed in the Bible. Each member must affirm and submit to the teaching of Scripture as expressed in the Statement of Faith and must promise to keep the commitments expressed in the Church Covenant. The elders shall be responsible for examining each person's qualification for

membership and recommend qualified people to the congregation for acceptance. In making this determination, they may rely on a person's profession of faith, or such other evidence, as the elders deem appropriate. If the person needs to be baptized the elder's recommendation for membership will be made following the baptism.

## Section 2 – Admission of Members

To be admitted into church membership, applicants shall be recommended by the elders for admission and accepted by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting at any regular or special meeting of the members and shall at that point relinquish his or her membership in other churches.

## Section 3 – Duties and Privileges of Membership

In accord with the duties enumerated in the Church Covenant, each member shall be privileged and expected to participate in and contribute to the ministry and life of the church, consistent with God's leading and with the gifts, time, and material resources each has received from God. Only those shall be entitled to serve in the ministries of the church who are members of this congregation; non-members may serve on an ad-hoc basis with the approval of the elders. Notwithstanding, non-members may serve the church for purposes of administration and professional consultation if requested by the elders.

Under Christ, this church is passively governed by its members, as the congregation is the final authority under God's Word in matters of doctrine and leadership (Galatians 1) and responsible for the inclusion and exclusion of members (Matthew 16; 18; I Corinthians 5). Therefore, it is the privilege and responsibility of members to attend all members' meetings to vote on the affirmation of officers, on decisions regarding membership status, and on such other matters as may be outlined in this Constitution or brought forward by the elders.

All decisions not specifically reserved to the congregation in the Bible or this Constitution may be made by the elders. The congregation has a responsibility to provide helpful information and insight to the elders when they take or recommend actions, and to appropriately obey and submit to the elder's leadership (Hebrews 13:17). The elders have a responsibility to keep the congregation informed about significant matters under consideration and, when possible and appropriate, to seek input and recommendations from the congregation on such matters.

## Section 4 – Church Discipline

Any member consistently neglectful of his or her duties or guilty of conduct by which the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be dishonored, and so opposing the welfare of the church, shall be subject to the admonition and/or discipline of the church, according to the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15–17 and the example of scripture. Church discipline, then, should ordinarily be contemplated after individual private admonition has failed.

Church discipline can include admonition by the elders and/or church members. It can also include suspension from communion for a defined period, deposition from office, and/or

excommunication as voted upon by the congregation according to “Article 3, Section 5” (see Matthew 18:15–17; II Thessalonians 3:14–15; I Timothy 5:19– 20; I Corinthians 5:4–5).

The purpose of such discipline should be for the repentance, reconciliation, and spiritual growth of the individual disciplined (see Proverbs 15:5; 29:15; I Corinthians 4:14; Ephesians 6:4; I Timothy 3:4–5; Hebrews 12:1–11; Psalm 119:115; 141:5; Proverbs 17:10; 25:12; 27:5; Ecclesiastes 7:5; Matthew 7:26–27; 18:15–17; Luke 17:3; Acts 2:40; I Corinthians 5:5; Galatians 6:1–5; II Thessalonians 3:6, 14–15; I Timothy 1:20; Titus 1:13–14; James 1:22);

For the instruction in righteousness and good of other Christians, as an example to them (see Proverbs 13:20; Romans 15:14; I Corinthians 5:11; 15:33; Colossians 3:16; I Thessalonians 5:14 [note this is written to the whole church, not just to leaders]; I Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:11; Hebrews 10:24– 25);

For the purity of the church as a whole (see I Corinthians 5:6–7; II Corinthians 13:10; Ephesians 5:27; II John 10; Jude 24; Revelation 21:2);

For the good of our corporate witness to non–Christians (see Proverbs 28:7; Matthew 5:13–16; John 13:35; Acts 5:1–14; Ephesians 5:11; I Timothy 3:7; II Peter 2:2; I John 3:10); and

Supremely for the glory of God by reflecting His holy character (see Deuteronomy 5:11; I Kings 11:2; II Chronicles 19:2; Ezra 6:21; Nehemiah 9:2; Isaiah 52:11; Ezekiel 36:20; Matthew 5:16; John 15:8; 18:17, 25; Romans 2:24; 15:5–6; II Corinthians 6:14–7: 1; Ephesians 1:4; 5:27; I Peter 2:12).

## Section 5 – Termination of Membership

The church shall recognize (under the leadership of the elders) the termination of a person’s membership following his or her death or may do so after he or she has voluntarily resigned or joined with another church. Membership may also be terminated as an act of church discipline (ordinarily, but not necessarily, at the recommendation of the elders) upon the vote of at least two-thirds of the members present and voting at any regular or special meeting of the members.

The church shall have authority to refuse a member’s voluntary resignation or transfer of membership to another church, either for the purpose of proceeding with a process of church discipline, or for any other biblical reason.

## Article 4 - Meetings

### Section 1 – Worship Services

Worship services shall usually be held each Lord's Day and may be held throughout the week as the church determines.

## Section 2 – Members’ Meetings

In every meeting together, members shall act in that spirit of mutual trust, openness, and loving consideration which is appropriate within the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There shall be a regular members’ meeting, announced at least two weeks ahead of time, generally held every quarter of the year, at some time apart from a public worship service. The lead pastor shall normally moderate all members’ meetings of the church. The elders shall see that the stated meetings of the church are regularly held and that required reports are submitted to the church by the responsible members.

Provided all constitutional provisions for notification have been met, a quorum of 60% shall be understood to be met by those members present. All votes shall be tallied based on the number of votes cast by members present and voting.

A budget shall be approved by the membership with a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting at a members’ meeting held during the three months prior to the start of the fiscal year.

At any regular or special members’ meeting, officers may be affirmed, and positions filled as needed, so long as all relevant constitutional requirements have been met.

Special members’ meetings may be called as required by the elders as needs arise. The date, time, and purpose of any special meeting shall be announced at all public worship services of the church within two weeks preceding the meeting. In the event of a written request from a church member regarding a need for the congregation to address, the elders will either call a special meeting or will include that item at the next regular members’ meeting.

## **Article 5 – Officers**

### Section 1 – Summary

The Biblical offices in the church are elders and deacons. In addition, our church recognizes the administrative positions under this Constitution of clerk and treasurer. All officers must be members of this church prior to assuming their responsibilities.

### Section 2 – Elders

The elders shall be comprised of not less than three men (unless a smaller number is permitted by a vote of 75% of the voting members present at a regular or special members’ meeting) who satisfy the qualifications for the office of elder set forth in I Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:6–9. No elder shall hold the office of deacon during his tenure.

Subject to the accountability of the congregation, the elders shall oversee the ministry and resources of the church. In keeping with the principles set forth in Acts 6:1–6 and I Peter 5:1–4,

the elders shall devote their time to prayer, the ministry of the Word (by teaching and encouraging sound doctrine), and shepherding God's flock.

The church shall recognize men gifted and willing to serve in this calling, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on Congregational Voting. These men shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as elders. Elders may serve for as long as they remain qualified and desire the ministry. However, each elder, not including the lead and associate pastors, must take a six-month sabbatical, at a time of his choosing, during every three-year period of his ministry. Sabbaticals for the lead and associate pastors will be considered and granted according to the discretion of the elders.

An elder's term of office may be terminated by resignation or by dismissal by the congregation. Any two members with reason to believe that an elder should be dismissed should express such concern to the elders. Any such action shall be done in accordance with the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15–17 and I Timothy 5:17–21. Any of the elders may be dismissed by a two-thirds vote of the members at any official members' meeting of the church.

The elders shall take particular responsibility to examine and instruct prospective members; train, examine, and recommend all prospective candidates for elder, deacon, and other positions; oversee the work of the deacons and appointed church agents and committees; conduct worship services; administer the ordinances of baptism and communion; equip the membership for the work of the ministry; encourage sound doctrine and practice; admonish and correct error; oversee the process of church discipline; coordinate and promote the ministries of the church; and mobilize the church for world missions. The elders are further to ensure that all who minister the Word to the congregation, including outside speakers, share our fundamental convictions.

The elders may establish ministry positions or committees to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities. The elders may also propose funding for new paid staff positions. The membership shall approve all candidates to fill the positions of lead and associate pastor.

The elders shall have primary responsibility for the employment, supervision, and evaluation of staff members. This responsibility may, on a case-by-case basis, be delegated to another staff member.

Each year the elders shall present to the church an itemized budget. They may enlist the help of the church treasurer and any other members they deem necessary for this task. This budget shall be presented for discussion and a vote at a regular or special members' meeting held during the three months prior to the start of the fiscal year. No money shall be solicited by or on behalf of the church or any of its ministries without the approval of the elders.

The lead pastor shall serve as the chairman of elders' meetings and moderator of members' meetings. In the absence of a lead pastor the elders shall choose both a chairman and moderator. For purposes of compliance with nonprofit corporation laws the elders shall choose one of their number to serve as the president of the corporation as well as any other corporation members required.

### Section 3 – Lead Pastor

The lead pastor shall be an elder. He shall perform the duties of an elder described in Article 5, Section 2, and shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full-time ministry of preaching and teaching.

He shall be responsible, with the help of other elders, for the preaching on the Lord's Day, administration of the ordinances of baptism and communion, and perform such other duties as usually pertain to that office, or as set forth in the Constitution.

In the absence or incapacity of the lead pastor the elders shall assume responsibility for his duties, any of which can be delegated.

### Section 4 – Associate Pastors

The church may call additional pastors whose relationship to the lead pastor is that of associate.

An associate pastor shall be an elder. He shall perform the duties of an elder described in Article 5, Section 2, and shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full-time ministry of preaching and teaching.

He shall assist the lead pastor in the performance of his regular duties and shall perform any other duties as usually pertain to the office of pastor, or as set forth in the Constitution, or which may be specifically assigned to him by the elders.

In the absence or incapacity of the lead pastor for defined periods of time (such as sabbatical or illness), the associate pastor(s) may assume the responsibility for his duties under the oversight of the elders.

### Section 5 – Deacons

The office of deacon, along with its qualifications, is described in I Timothy 3:8–13 and Acts 6:1–7. The church shall recognize, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on Congregational Voting, men who are giving of themselves in service to the church, and who possess particular gifts of service. These men shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as deacons. Deacons may continue serving for as long as they remain qualified, desire the ministry, and maintain the confidence of both the elders and congregation. The elders may remove a deacon if they determine he is no longer qualified or no longer maintains this confidence.

Deacons are not a governing body, nor do they function as a separate deliberative body within the church competing with the elders over decisions. Instead, deacons are responsible for carrying out the particular ministry or service to which they have been assigned.



Serving under the direction of the elders, deacons meet certain needs that arise within the church such as caring for the temporal needs of members, attending to the accommodations for public worship, and encouraging those with gifts of administration.

#### Section 6 – Clerk

It shall be the duty of the clerk to record the minutes of all regular and special members' meetings of the church, to preserve an accurate roll of the membership, and to render reports as requested by a pastor, the elders, the deacons, or the church.

The church clerk shall ensure that dated copies of the most recent revision of this Constitution shall be available for all church members.

The clerk shall be recommended by the elders and affirmed by vote of the congregation. The elders may remove the church clerk if they determine a change is necessary.

#### Section 7 – Treasurer

The treasurer, who shall not be an active elder or paid church staff member, shall ensure that all funds and securities of the church are properly secured in such banks, financial institutions, or depositories as appropriate. The treasurer shall also be responsible for presenting regular reports of the account balances, revenues and expenses of the church at each members' meeting. The responsibility may be delegated with the approval of the elders. The treasurer shall also ensure that full and accurate accounts of receipts and disbursements are kept and that adequate controls are implemented to guarantee that all funds belonging to the church are appropriately handled by any officer, employee, or agent of the church. The treasurer shall render to the elders annually, or whenever they may require it, an account of all transactions as treasurer and of the financial condition of the church. The elders shall ensure that necessary measures of accountability are in place to protect the Treasurer and the church.

The treasurer shall be recommended by the elders and affirmed by vote of the congregation. The elders may remove the treasurer if they determine a change is necessary.

#### Section 8 – Property Stewards

It shall be the duty of all property stewards to ensure that the church building and grounds needs are met under the leadership of the elders.

The property stewards shall be recommended by the elders and affirmed by vote of the congregation. The elders may remove the property stewards if they determine a change is necessary.

## **Article 6 – Congregational Voting**

### **Section 1 – Principles**

The process for congregational voting shall be interpreted and carried out to fulfill the following principles:

Substantial prayer, both individually and corporately, should be an integral part of the voting process; all people considered for church office should be treated with the grace, kindness, and honesty appropriate in evaluating fellow members; the voting process shall express that spirit of mutual trust, openness, and loving consideration that is appropriate within the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Section 2 – Affirmation of Officers**

The affirmation of officers shall be held at any members' meeting of the church. Recommended names to serve as elders, deacons, clerk, treasurer, or property stewards shall be presented by the elders at least four weeks before the vote on these officers.

The elders should welcome and seek recommendations from the general membership. Any member with reason to believe that a recommended candidate is unqualified for an office or position should express such concern to the elders. Members intending to speak in opposition to a candidate should express their objection to the elders as far in advance as possible before the relevant members' meeting.

The moderator shall declare affirmed all men receiving a 75% majority of all votes cast for the office of elder and deacon. For other positions, the moderator shall declare affirmed all persons receiving a simple majority of all votes cast; abstentions will not be considered as votes cast.

The persons affirmed shall assume their respective offices immediately, unless another date has been specifically designated.

### **Section 3 – Calling of Lead Pastor**

In the calling of any man to this position, the same basic process of calling an elder must be followed. When this need arises, the process for evaluating potential men for this role will be determined by the elders and communicated to the congregation. In addition, however, the church must be given adequate opportunity to assess the preaching gifts of any potential lead pastor and, before being asked to express its judgment, must receive assurance from the elders that, having interviewed the man concerned, they are in no doubt as to his wholehearted assent to the Statement of Faith and Church Covenant. Notice of the recommendation of a man to be called as lead pastor (which shall include, if necessary, admittance to membership of him and his wife if he is married) must be given at two Sunday worship services following the recommendation, prior to the vote at a members' meeting.

## Section 4 – Calling of Associate Pastor

In the calling of any man to the position of associate pastor, the same basic process of calling an elder must be followed. When this need arises, the process for evaluating potential men for this role will be determined by the elders and communicated to the congregation. In addition, however, the church must be given adequate opportunity to assess the teaching gifts of any potential associate pastor and, before being asked to express its judgment, must receive assurance from the elders that, having interviewed the man concerned, they are in no doubt as to his wholehearted assent to the Statement of Faith and Church Covenant. Notice of the recommendation of a man to be called as associate pastor (which shall include, if necessary, admittance to membership of him and his wife if he is married) must be given at two Sunday morning services following the recommendation, prior to the vote at a members' meeting.

## Article 7 – Indemnification

### Section 1 – Mandatory Indemnification

If a legal claim or criminal allegation is made against a person because he or she is or was an officer, employee, or agent of the church, the church shall provide indemnification against liability and costs incurred in defending against the claim if the elders determine that the person acted (a) in good faith, (b) with the care an ordinarily prudent person in a similar position would exercise under similar circumstances, and (c) in a manner the person reasonably believed to be in the best interest of the church, and the person had no reasonable cause to believe his or her conduct was unlawful.

### Section 2 – Permissive Indemnification

At the discretion of the elders, the church also may indemnify any person who acted in good faith and reasonably believed that his or her conduct was in the church's best interest and not unlawful.

### Section 3 – Procedure

If a quorum of the elders is not available for an indemnification determination because of the number of elders seeking indemnification, the requisite determination may be made by the membership or by special legal counsel appointed by the membership.

## Article 8 – Dispute Resolution

Believing that the Bible commands Christians to make every effort to live at peace and to resolve disputes with each other in private or within the Christian church (see, e.g., Matthew 18:15–20, I Corinthians 6:1–8), the church shall require its members to resolve conflict among themselves according to biblically based principles, without reliance on the secular courts. However, this does not negate any legal reporting requirements to law enforcement. Consistent with its call to peacemaking, the church shall encourage the use of biblically based principles to resolve

disputes between itself and those outside the church, whether Christian or pagan and whether individuals or corporate entities.

### **Article 9 – Amendments**

The Statement of Faith and Church Covenant may be amended by a three-quarters vote of the members present and voting at a members' meeting, provided the amendment shall have been offered in writing at the previous members' meeting, and shall have been announced at church services two successive Sundays prior to such vote. This Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting at a members' meeting, provided the amendment shall have been offered in writing at the previous members' meeting, and shall have been announced at church services two successive Sundays prior to such vote.

The revised version of this Constitution shall be made available to all church members by the church clerk.

### **Article 10 – Dissolution and Reversion**

Upon the dissolution of the church, the corporate officers shall, after paying or making provision for payment of all liabilities of the church, make certain that all church property and appurtenances revert to and become vested in the Florida Baptist Convention, to be used for church and mission purposes.

### **Article 11 – Church Covenant**

The covenant made together by the members of Riverside Baptist Church is as follows:

“Having received Christ as my Savior and having been baptized, and being in agreement with Riverside's statements, strategy, and structure, I have been led of the Holy Spirit to unite with the family of Riverside. In doing so, I commit myself to God and to the other members to do the following:

I will protect the unity of Riverside by acting in love and grace toward the family of God, in speech, action, and discipline and by praying, supporting and assisting the leadership of the church (Rom. 14:19; 1 John 4:11-12; Eph. 4:29; Heb. 13:7, 17).

I will share the responsibility of Riverside by praying for the physical needs and spiritual growth of its members, by engaging with non-believers for the sake of the Gospel, and by warmly welcoming and purposely seeking to engage those who visit our weekly public gathering (1 Thess. 1:1-2; Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 15:5-7).

I will serve the ministry of Riverside by faithfully seeking God and the development and use of my spiritual gifts for the building up of the body, by faithfully attending weekly to be equipped by my elders, and by developing the heart of Christ, who seeks to serve and not be served for the good of the Kingdom (1 Peter 4:10; Eph. 4:11-12; Phil. 2:3-5).

I will support the testimony of Riverside by attending faithfully to be an encouragement to the body, by being an example of Christ in my daily life, and by giving in faith regularly to the work of the local body of Christ assembled there (Heb. 10:24-25; Phil. 1:27; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7).”