

***Form
of
Government***

Form of Government

OF THE

BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

CHAPTER I

Preliminary Principles

The Bible Presbyterian Church in setting forth the Form of Government which it maintains as being founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God, reiterates, by way of introduction, several great principles which are basic to and regulative of our form of Church government:

1. That “God alone is Lord of the conscience”; and “hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to his word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship”: Therefore we consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable: we do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and, at the same time, be equal and common to all others.

2. That in perfect consistency with the above principle of common right, every Christian Church, or union, or association of particular Churches is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its *communion*, and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government which Christ hath appointed: that, in the exercise of this right it may, notwithstanding, err, in making the terms of communion either too lax or too narrow; yet, even in this case, it does not infringe upon the liberty, or the rights of others, but only makes an improper use of its own.

3. That our blessed Savior, for the edification of the visible Church, which is his body, hath appointed officers not only to preach the

gospel and administer the Sacraments; but also to exercise discipline for the preservation both of truth and duty; and, that it is incumbent upon these officers, and upon the whole Church, in whose name they act, to censure or cast out the erroneous and scandalous; observing, in *all* cases, the rules contained in the Word of God.

4. That truth is in order to goodness; and the great touchstone of truth, its tendency to promote holiness; according to our Saviour's rule, "by their fruits ye shall know them," and that no opinion can be either more pernicious or more absurd, than that which brings truth and falsehood upon a level and represents it as of no consequence what a man's opinions are. On the contrary, we are persuaded that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise it would be of no consequence either to discover truth, or to embrace it.

5. That while under the conviction of the above principle, we think it necessary to make effectual provision, that all who are admitted as teachers, be sound in the faith; we also believe that there are truths and forms, with respect to which men of good character and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the duty both of private Christians and societies, to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.

6. That though the character, qualifications, and authority of Church officers are laid down in the Holy Scriptures, as well as the proper method of their investiture and institution; yet the election of the persons to the exercise of this authority, in any particular society, is in that society.

7. That all Church power, whether exercised by the body in general, or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative; *that is to say*, that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no Church court ought to pretend to make laws, to bind the conscience in virtue of its own authority; and that all its decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God. Now though it will easily be admitted, that all Synods and Councils may err, through the frailty inseparable from

humanity; yet there is much greater danger from the usurped claim of making laws, than from the right of judging upon laws already made, and common to all who profess the Gospel; although this right, as necessity requires in the present state, be lodged with fallible men.

8. *Lastly*, that, if the preceding Scriptural and rational principles be steadfastly adhered to, the vigor and strictness of its discipline will contribute to the glory and happiness of any Church. Since ecclesiastical discipline must be purely moral or spiritual in its object, and not attended with any civil effects, it can derive no force whatever, but from its own justice, the approbation of an impartial public, and the countenance and blessing of the great Head of the Church universal.

9. All powers not in this Constitution specifically granted to the courts of the Church are reserved to the congregations respectively, or to the people.

CHAPTER II

Of the Church

1. Jesus Christ, who is now exalted far above all principality and power, has erected, in this world, a visible body which is his Church.
2. The catholic visible Church consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children.
3. This catholic visible Church has, in God's providence, become divided into bodies commonly termed denominations or Churches. Such bodies, whether local, national, or international, which in their creed and practice hold fast to the historic Christian faith, which require for admission into their communion what Christ requires for salvation, and which subordinate their authority to that of the Word of God are true Churches of Christ, despite differences in government or in matters not essential to the faith which may have caused their separation from others.

4. The Bible Presbyterian Church declares itself to be a branch of the catholic visible Church of Christ and further declares its willingness to hold Christian fellowship with all other such branches of the Church.

5. It is lawful and agreeable to the Word of God that members of Christ's body on earth should, as local circumstances require, be divided into particular Churches. A particular Church consists of a number of professing Christians, with their offspring, voluntarily associated together, for divine worship and godly living, agreeably to Holy Scripture; and submitting to a certain form of government.

6. It is highly desirable and the teaching of the Word that such particular Churches should be associated together with others of like precious faith for mutual fellowship, encouragement, advancement of the cause of Christ, and testimony to his truth.

CHAPTER III

Of Particular Churches of the Bible Presbyterian Church

1. Particular churches of the Bible Presbyterian Church shall be such churches as are defined in the previous chapter which desire to enter the fellowship of this branch of Christ's body. Entrance into this fellowship is by means of the presbytery.

2. Particular churches need remain in association with the Bible Presbyterian Church only so long as they themselves desire. The relationship is voluntary, based only upon mutual love and confidence, and is in no sense to be maintained by the exercise of any kind of force or coercion whatsoever. A particular church may withdraw at any time for reasons which seem sufficient to itself.

3. The ordinances established in the Bible by Christ, the Head, in a particular church, which is regularly constituted with its proper officers, are prayer, singing praises, reading, expounding and preaching the Word of God; administering Baptism and the Lord's Supper; public solemn thanksgiving, catechizing, making collections for the poor, and other pious purposes; exercising discipline; and blessing the people.

CHAPTER IV
Of Church Government

1. Almighty God in his providence has permitted that different portions of his Church should be governed in various ways, and has blessed bodies differently governed as his fruitful branches. Rejoicing in this fact and in no wise casting reflections upon bodies differently governed, we believe that government by presbyters is founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God and the practice of the primitive Christians, and is highly expedient.

2. We believe that government by two kinds of presbyters, ministers and ruling elders, who are to be joined in the oversight of the Church, is founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God, and is highly expedient.

3. Believing that Synods and Councils as set forth in our Confession of Faith are founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God, and believing further that, when Scripturally conducted, such courts are an aid to the faith and life of the flock of Christ, we authorize the spiritual government of this Church by Sessions, Presbyteries and Synods, which are to be composed only of Presbyters.

4. These courts shall not possess any civil jurisdiction, nor may they inflict any civil penalties. Their power is wholly moral and spiritual, and that only ministerial and declarative of the Word of God. They possess the right of requiring obedience to the commands of Christ and of excluding offenders against him from the privileges of the Church, but only in such manner and to such extent as is specifically authorized by the Constitution of this Church.

5. The ordinary and perpetual officers in this Church are Ministers, Ruling Elders, and Deacons.

CHAPTER V
Of Ministers

The office of the minister is first in the Church, both for dignity and usefulness. The person who fills the office has, in Scripture, obtained different names expressive of his various duties. As he has the oversight of the flock of Christ, he is termed bishop. As he feeds

them with spiritual food, he is termed pastor. As he serves Christ in his Church, he is termed minister. As it is his duty to be grave and prudent, and an example of the flock, and to govern well in the house and kingdom of Christ, he is termed presbyter or elder. As he is sent to declare the will of God to sinners, and to beseech them to be reconciled to God through Christ, he is termed ambassador. And, as he dispenses the manifold grace of God, and the ordinances instituted by Christ, he is termed steward of the mysteries of God, and in humility he is the servant of Christ, separated unto the Gospel of God.

CHAPTER VI Of Ruling Elders

Ruling elders are the particular representatives of the people, chosen by them from their own number, for the purpose of joining with the pastors or ministers in the government and discipline of the Church. This office is recognized in Holy Scripture.

CHAPTER VII Of Deacons

The Scriptures clearly point out deacons as distinct officers in the Church, whose business it is to take care of the poor, and to distribute among them the collections which may be raised for their use.

CHAPTER VIII Of the Church Session

1. The Church session consists of the pastor or pastors and ruling elders, of a particular congregation.
2. If there are more than nine ruling elders, the pastor and at least one third of the elders shall constitute a quorum. If there are three to nine ruling elders, the pastor and two ruling elders shall constitute a quorum. If there are less than three ruling elders, the pastor and one ruling elder shall constitute a quorum. When a Church has no pastor

and there are more than nine ruling elders, five shall constitute a quorum; if there are five to nine ruling elders, three shall constitute a quorum; if there are less than five ruling elders, two shall constitute a quorum; if there is only one ruling elder, he does not constitute a Session, but he should take spiritual oversight of the Church, should represent it at Presbytery and Synod, should grant letters of dismission, and should report to the Presbytery any matter needing the action of a Church court. However, any Session, by a majority vote of its members, may fix its own quorum, provided that it is not smaller than the quorums stated in this paragraph.

3. The pastor of the congregation shall always be the moderator of the Session; except when, for prudential reasons, it may appear advisable that some other minister should be invited to preside; in which case the pastor may, with the concurrence of the Session, invite such other minister of this Church as they may see meet to preside in that case. The same expedient may be adopted in case of the sickness or absence of the pastor.

4. It is expedient, at every meeting of the Session, more especially when constituted for judicial business, that there be a presiding minister. When, therefore, a Church is without a pastor, the moderator of the Session shall be either the minister appointed for that purpose by the Presbytery, or one invited by the Session to preside on a particular occasion. But where it is impracticable, without great inconvenience, to procure the attendance of such a moderator, the Session may proceed informally without it, any action taken at such an informal meeting being subject to ratification at a duly constituted meeting.

5. In congregations where there are two or more co-pastors, they shall, when present, alternately preside in the Session.

6. The Church Session is charged with maintaining the spiritual government of the congregation; for which purpose, they have power to inquire into the knowledge and Christian conduct of the members of the Church; to call before them offenders and witnesses, being members of their own congregation, and to introduce other witnesses, where it may be necessary to bring the process to issue, and when they can be procured to attend; to receive members into

the Church by confession of faith in Jesus Christ, reaffirmation of faith in Jesus Christ, or Church letter; to admonish, to rebuke, to suspend, or exclude from the sacraments those who are found to deserve censure; to determine all matters concerning the conduct of worship and of other religious services, to concert the best measures for promoting the spiritual interests of the congregation, including the supervision of the Sunday school and of other organizations within the Church; and to appoint delegates to the higher courts of the Church.

7. The pastor has power to convene the Session when he may judge it requisite; and he shall always convene them when requested to do so by any two of the elders.

8. Every Session shall keep a clear record of its proceedings; which record shall be, at least once in every year, submitted to the inspection of the Presbytery.

9. Every Session shall keep registers or rolls of the members of the Church, both of believers and of their baptized children; of suspensions from the Lord's Table; of the deaths and other removals of Church members but the names of members shall be placed upon or removed from the rolls of the Church only by order of the Session.

CHAPTER IX **Of the Presbytery**

1. A Presbytery consists of all the ministers, in number not less than three, and regularly elected ruling elders from each congregation, within a certain district.

2. Every congregation shall be represented by at least one elder. Congregations having from three hundred to six hundred communicant members on the rolls shall be represented by two elders; those with six hundred to nine hundred communicant members by three elders; those with nine hundred to twelve hundred communicant members by four elders, and larger congregations in the same ratio thereafter.

3. Any two ministers, and at least one elder belonging to the Presbytery, being met at the time and place appointed, shall be a quorum competent to proceed to business.

4. The Presbytery has power to receive and issue all complaints, and other matters, that are brought before it from Church sessions in a regular manner; to examine and licence candidates for the holy ministry; to ordain, install, remove, and judge ministers; to examine the records of Church Sessions; to resolve questions of doctrine or discipline seriously and reasonably proposed; to condemn opinions which injure the purity or peace of the Church; to unite or divide congregations, at the request of the people, but not without their consent, or to form or receive new congregations, and, in general, to order whatever pertains to the spiritual welfare of the Churches under its care, always respecting the liberties guaranteed to individual congregations and persons under the Constitution.

5. It shall be the duty of the Presbytery to keep a full and clear record of its proceedings, and to report to the General Synod, every year, censures, ordinations, the receiving or dismissing of members, the removal of members by death, the union or division of congregations, or the formation of new ones, and, in general, all the important changes which may have taken place within their bounds in the course of the year.

6. The Presbytery shall meet on its own adjournment; and when any emergency shall require a meeting sooner than the time to which it stands adjourned, the moderator, or, in the case of his absence, death, or inability to act, the clerk, shall, with the concurrence, or at the request of two ministers and two elders, the elders being of different congregations, call a special meeting. For this purpose he shall send a circular letter, specifying the particular business of the intended meeting, to every minister belonging to the Presbytery, and to the session of every vacant congregation, in due time previous to the meeting; which shall not be less than seven days. And nothing shall be transacted at such special meeting besides the particular business for which the court has thus been convened.

7. Every particular Session shall be opened and closed with prayer.

8. Ministers in good standing in other Presbyteries, or in any sister Churches, who may happen to be present, may be invited to sit with the Presbytery, as corresponding members. Such members shall be entitled to deliberate and advise, but not to vote in any decisions of the Presbytery.

9. At the request of national believers in other countries, the Synod may form Associate Presbyteries in accordance with the following principles: (1) Associate Presbyteries are to be constituted as provided for in this chapter, with national ministers and elders; (2) Associate Presbyteries are entitled to representation by delegates (one minister and one elder elected for that purpose) at the General Synod with all the rights of speaking on the floor; (3) representatives from an Associate Presbytery may not vote in Synod on domestic (US) non-constitutional or disciplinary matters; (4) US or Canadian missionaries shall remain members of their respective presbyteries, and may only participate in the Associate Presbytery as corresponding members at the pleasure of the Associate Presbytery; (5) The records of the Associate Presbytery's minutes must be kept in English and submitted to the General Synod annually for review; (6) In all other respects, an overseas Associate Presbytery functions as does its counterparts in the United States. (7) The ultimate goal of the Associate Presbytery is independency as a national church in its own right, this transitional relationship being formed to facilitate that goal as quickly as possible.

CHAPTER X

Of the General Synod

1. The General Synod of this Church shall consist of every minister and of elders from particular Churches, according to the ratio set forth in Chapter IX, section 2.

2. Any fifteen or more of these commissioners, one half of whom shall be ministers, being met on the day, and at the place appointed, shall be a quorum for the transaction of business.

3. The General Synod shall have power to organize and conduct its business in a democratic and Christian manner. It shall receive and

issue all appeals and complaints that affect the doctrine or Constitution of the Church, and are regularly brought before it from Presbyteries or Sessions, *provided*, that in administrative or judicial cases the General Synod shall have power to act by commission, subject to the provisions of the Book of Discipline. The General Synod shall review the records of every Presbytery; it shall give its advice and instruction, in all cases submitted to it, in conformity with the Constitution of the Church, and it shall constitute the bond of union, peace, correspondence, and mutual confidence among all our Churches.

4. To the General Synod also belongs the power of deciding in all controversies respecting doctrine and discipline; of reproof, warning or bearing testimony against error in doctrine, or immorality in practice, in any Church or Presbytery; of erecting new Presbyteries when it may be judged necessary; of corresponding with other Churches, on such terms as may be agreed upon by the Synod and the corresponding body, of recommending and aiding promotion of charity, truth, and holiness, through all the Churches.

5. Although the deliverances, resolutions, overtures, and other actions of the General Synod are to be accorded the weight which is proper in view of the character of the body, yet whenever such deliverances, resolutions, overtures, and other actions are additional to the specific provisions of the Constitution, they shall not be regarded as binding unless they become amendments to the Constitution.

6. The General Synod may, at its own discretion, set up committees to act as its agents in conducting benevolent, missionary and educational enterprises, or it may commend to the churches, for their support, other such Christian enterprises.

7. The General Synod shall meet upon its own adjournment. On the day appointed for that purpose the moderator of the last Synod, if present, shall open the meeting with a sermon, or in the case of his absence, some other minister shall open the meeting with a sermon and preside until a moderator be chosen. No commissioner shall have a right to deliberate or vote in the Synod until his name shall

have been enrolled, and his commission examined and filed among the papers of the Synod.

8. Each session of the Synod shall be opened and closed with prayer. And the whole business of the Synod being finished, and the vote taken for dissolving the present Synod, the moderator shall say from the chair — “By virtue of the authority delegated to me, by the Church, let this General Synod be dissolved, and I do hereby dissolve it, and require another General Synod chosen in the same manner, to meet at ____ on the ____ day of ____ A.D. _____” — after which he shall pray and return thanks, and pronounce on those present the apostolic benediction.

9. *Pro re nata* meetings of the General Synod may be called by the moderator of the preceding Synod, or, in the case of his death, absence, or inability to act, by the clerk, with the concurrence or at the request of at least one-third of the ministers of the Church and an equal number of ruling elders. Calling of such meeting shall be mandatory if it shall be demanded in writing by more than half the ministers of the Church and an equal number of elders. Not less than thirty days’ notice shall be given of such meeting.

CHAPTER XI

Of the Board of Deacons

1. In order to facilitate the performance of the duties of their office, the deacons of each particular church shall, with the pastor, be constituted a board of deacons.
2. The pastor shall be the moderator of the board, but a member appointed by the pastor may serve when he is not present. The other officers shall be chosen from the membership of the board.
3. The board shall make a quarterly report of its activities, including its disbursements, to the session.

CHAPTER XII

Of Electing and Ordaining Ruling Elders and Deacons

1. Every congregation shall elect persons to the office of ruling elder, and in ordinary circumstances to the office of deacon, in whatever manner it may approve. In all cases the persons elected must be members in full communion in the Church in which they are to exercise their office. Ruling elders must be men.

2. When any person shall have been elected to either of these offices, and shall have declared his willingness to accept thereof, he shall be set apart in the following manner:

3. After the sermon, the minister shall state, in a concise manner, the warrant and nature of the office of ruling elder or deacon, together with the character proper to be sustained, and the duties to be fulfilled by the officer elect; having done this, he shall propose to the candidate, in the presence of the congregation, the following questions, viz.:

(1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?

(2) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?

(3) Do you approve of the government and discipline of the Bible Presbyterian Church?

(4) Do you accept the office of ruling elder (or deacon, as the case may be,) in this congregation, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof?

(5) Do you promise to study the purity, peace, and unity of the Church?

The elder, or deacon elect, having answered these questions in the affirmative, the minister shall address to the members of the church the following questions, viz.:

“Do you, the members of this Church, acknowledge and receive this brother as a ruling elder (or deacon), and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement and obedience in the Lord, to which his office, according to the Word of God, and the Constitution of this Church, entitles him?”

The members of the Church having answered this question in the affirmative by holding up their right hands, the minister shall proceed to set apart the candidate, by prayer, to the office of ruling elder (or deacon, as the case may be,) and shall give to him and to the congregation, an exhortation suited to the occasion.

4. Where there is an existing Session, it is proper that the members of that body, at the close of the service, and in the face of the congregation, take the newly ordained elder by the hand, saying words to this purpose — “We give you the right hand of fellowship, to take part of this office with us.”

5. The offices of ruling elder and deacon are both perpetual, and cannot be laid aside at pleasure. No person can be divested of either office but by deposition. Yet an elder or deacon may become, by age or infirmity, incapable of performing the duties of his office; or he may, though chargeable with neither heresy nor immorality, become unacceptable, in his official character, to a majority of the congregation to which he belongs. In either of these cases, he may, as often happens with respect to a minister, cease to be an acting elder or deacon.

6. Whenever a ruling elder or deacon, from either of these causes, or from any other, not inferring crime, shall be incapable of serving the Church to edification, the Session shall take order on the subject, and state the fact, together with the reasons of it, on their records, *provided always*, that nothing of this kind shall be done without the concurrence of the individual in question, unless by a vote of the congregation.

7. If any particular Church, by a vote of members in full communion, shall prefer to elect ruling elders or deacons for a limited time in the exercise of their functions, this may be done; *provided*, the full time be not less than three years, and the Session or board of deacons be

made to consist of three classes, one of which only shall be elected every year; and *provided*, that elders, once ordained, shall not be divested of the office when they are not re-elected, but shall be entitled to represent that particular Church in the higher courts, when appointed by the session or the Presbytery.

CHAPTER XIII
Of Licensing Candidates or Probationers
To Preach the Gospel

1. The Holy Scriptures require that some trial be previously had of those who are to be ordained to the ministry of the Gospel, that this sacred office may not be degraded by being committed to weak or unworthy men; and that the churches may have an opportunity to form a better judgment respecting the talents of those by whom they are to be instructed and governed. For this purpose Presbyteries shall license probationers to preach the Gospel, that, after a competent trial of their talents, and receiving from the churches a good report, they may, in due time, ordain them to the sacred office.

2. Every candidate looking toward licensure shall ordinarily be taken under care of that Presbytery to which he most naturally belongs.

3. It is proper and requisite that a candidate applying to be taken under care of a Presbytery be a communicant member of a particular church approved by the Presbytery, and come with a written recommendation from the session of the church of which he is a member. It is the duty of the Presbytery, for its satisfaction with regard to the piety of the candidate, to examine him respecting his experimental knowledge of religion, and the motives which influence him to desire the sacred office. And the Presbytery shall continue to show its concern, after such examination, for the progress of all the candidates under its care, and shall advise with them with regard to their preparation for the work of the ministry.

4. Because it is highly reproachful to religion and dangerous to the church to trust the holy ministry to weak and ignorant men, the Presbytery shall admit a candidate to licensure only if he has received a bachelor of arts degree, or its academic equivalent, from

an accredited college or university. He must also have completed at least two years of study in a theological seminary.

5. The candidate shall be examined by the Presbytery, or by a committee appointed for that purpose, in the English Bible, theology, ecclesiastical history, and in the original languages of the Scriptures, except that the examination in the languages of Scripture maybe waived upon the presentation of a transcript showing that creditable work has been done in these subjects. Every candidate at the time of his examination in theology shall read a brief, written statement of his belief before the Presbytery and file the same with the stated clerk. If the examination of candidates is referred to a committee, an examination in theology shall also be held before the Presbytery; and if one-fourth of the presbyters are dissatisfied with the examination in theology the candidate shall be required to undergo an examination in the subject again at a future meeting of the Presbytery. If one-fourth of the Presbyters are still dissatisfied they may demand that a written record of the examination be filed with the Presbytery.

6. And in order to make trial of his talents to explain and vindicate, and practically to enforce the doctrines of the Gospel, the Presbytery shall further require that the candidate prepare (1) a sermon, which the presbytery may ask to be delivered in its presence, (2) an essay on a theological theme, and (3) an exegesis of the original Hebrew or Greek text of a passage of Scripture.

7. That the most effectual measures may be taken to guard against the admission of unqualified men into the sacred office, no exception shall be made to any of the educational or other requirements outlined above unless the Presbytery shall judge, by a three-fourths vote of the members present, that the such exception is warranted by the exceptional qualifications of the candidate in question.

8. If the presbytery be satisfied with the trials of a candidate for licensure, it shall then proceed to license him in the following manner; the moderator shall propose to him the following questions, viz.:

(1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?

(2) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?

(3) Do you promise to study the purity, peace, and unity of the Church?

(4) Do you promise to submit yourself, in the Lord, to the government of this Presbytery, or of any other Presbytery in the bounds of which you may be called?

9. The candidate having answered these questions in the affirmative, and the moderator having offered up a prayer suitable to the occasion, he shall address himself to the candidate in the following purpose: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by that authority which he hath given to the Church for its edification, we do license you to preach the Gospel, wherever God in his providence may call you; and for this purpose, may the blessing of God rest upon you, and the Spirit of Christ fill your heart. Amen." And record shall be made of the licensure in the following or like form, viz.:

At _____ the _____ day of _____ the Presbytery of _____ having received testimonials in favor of his having gone through a regular course of literature; of his good moral character; and of his being in the communion of the Church; proceeded to take the usual parts of trial for his licensure; and he having given satisfaction as to his accomplishments in literature; as to his experimental acquaintance with religion; and as to his proficiency in divinity and other studies; the Presbytery did, and hereby does, express its approbation of all these parts of trial; and he having adopted the Confession of Faith of this Church, and satisfactorily answered the questions appointed to be put to candidates to be licensed; the presbytery did, and hereby does, license him, the said _____ to preach the Gospel of Christ as a probationer for the holy ministry, within the bounds of this Presbytery, or wherever else he shall be orderly called.

10. When any candidate for licensure shall have occasion, while his trials are going on, to remove from the bounds of his own Presbytery into those of another, it shall be considered as regular for the latter Presbytery, on his producing proper testimonials from the former, to take up his trials at the point at which they were left, and conduct them to a conclusion, in the same manner as if they had been commenced by themselves.

11. In like manner, when any candidate, after licensure, shall, by the permission of his Presbytery, remove without its limits, an extract of the record of his licensure, accompanied with a Presbyterial recommendation, signed by the clerk, shall be his testimonials to the Presbytery under whose care he shall come.

12. When a licentiate shall have been preaching for a considerable time, and his services do not appear to be edifying to the churches, the presbytery may, if it think proper, recall his license.

CHAPTER XIV **Of the Election of Pastors and of** **Ordination to the Ministry**

1. When any of the people of any congregation appear prepared to elect a pastor, the session shall take measures to convene them for this purpose; and it shall always be a duty of the Session to convene them, when a majority of the persons entitled to vote in the case, shall, by petition, request that a meeting be called.

2. When such a meeting is intended, the Session may solicit the presence and counsel of some neighboring minister to assist them in conducting the election contemplated, but they may proceed without such assistance.

3. On a Lord's Day it shall be intimated from the pulpit, that all the members of that congregation are requested to meet on _____ ensuing, at the Church, or usual place for holding public worship, then and there, if it be agreeable to them, to proceed to the election of a pastor for that congregation.

4. On the day appointed, the minister invited to preside, if he be present, shall, if it be deemed expedient, preach a sermon; and after the sermon he shall announce to the people, that he will immediately proceed to take the votes of the electors of that congregation, for a pastor, if such be their desire; and when this desire shall be expressed by a majority of voices, he shall then proceed to take votes accordingly. In this election, no person shall be entitled to vote who is not a communicant member in good standing of the particular Church.

5. When the votes are taken, if it appear that a large minority of the people are averse from the candidate who has a majority of votes, and cannot be induced to concur in the call, the presiding officer shall endeavor to dissuade the congregation from prosecuting it further. But if the people be nearly, or entirely, unanimous; or if the majority shall insist upon their right to call a pastor, the presiding officer, in that case, shall proceed to draw a call, in due form, and to have it subscribed by the electors or their duly authorized representatives; all which proceedings shall be laid before the Presbytery, together with the call.

6. The call shall be in the following or like form:

The congregation of _____ being, on sufficient grounds, well satisfied of the ministerial qualifications of you, _____, and having good hopes that your ministrations in the Gospel will be profitable to our spiritual interests, do earnestly call and desire you to undertake the pastoral office in said congregation; promising you in the discharge of your duty all proper support, encouragement, and obedience in the Lord. And that you may be free from worldly care and avocations, we promise and oblige ourselves to pay you the sum of _____ in regular _____ payments during the time of your being and continuing the regular pastor of this Church, together with free use of a house and _____ vacation each year.

The call shall be subscribed to by the members of the church, and shall be certified by the moderator of the meeting.

7. If any congregation shall choose to subscribe its call by its elders and deacons, or by a select committee, it shall be at liberty to do so.

But it shall, in each case, be fully certified to the Presbytery, by the minister, or other person who presided, that the persons signing have been appointed for that purpose by a public vote of the congregation; and that the call has been, in all other respects, prepared as above directed.

8. When a call shall be presented to any minister or candidate, it shall always be viewed as a sufficient petition from the people for his installation. The acceptance of a call, by a minister or candidate, shall always be considered as a request, on his part, to be installed at the same time. And when a candidate shall be ordained in consequence of a call from any congregation, the presbytery shall, at the same time, if practicable, install him pastor of that congregation.

9. The call, thus prepared, shall be presented to the Presbytery, under whose care the person called shall be; so that, if the presbytery think it expedient to present the call to him, it may be accordingly presented: and no minister or candidate shall receive a call but through the hands of the Presbytery.

10. If the call be to a licentiate of another Presbytery, in that case the commissioners deputed from the congregation to prosecute the call, shall produce, to that court, a certificate from their own Presbytery, regularly attested by the moderator and clerk, that the call has been laid before them, and that it is in order. If that Presbytery present the call to their licentiate, and he be disposed to accept it, they shall then dismiss him from their jurisdiction, and require him to repair to that presbytery, into the bounds of which he is called; and there to submit himself to the usual trials Preparatory to ordination.

11. Trials for ordination, especially in a different Presbytery from that in which the candidate was licensed, shall consist of a careful examination as to his acquaintance with experimental religion; as to his knowledge of philosophy, theology, ecclesiastical history, the Greek and Hebrew languages, and such other branches of learning as to the Presbytery may appear requisite; and as to his knowledge of the Constitution, the rules and principles of the government and discipline of the Church; together with such written discourse, or discourses, founded on the Word of God, as to the presbytery shall

seem proper. The Presbytery, being fully satisfied with his qualifications for the sacred office, shall appoint a day for his ordination, which ought to be, if convenient, in that Church of which he is to be the minister.

12. The day appointed for ordination being come and the Presbytery convened, a minister, previously appointed to that duty, shall preach a sermon adapted to the occasion. A member of the Presbytery appointed to preside, shall afterwards briefly recite from the pulpit, in the audience of the people, the proceedings of the Presbytery preparatory to this transaction; he shall point out the nature and importance of the ordinance; and endeavour to impress the audience with a proper sense of the solemnity of the transaction. Then addressing himself to the candidate, he shall propose to him the following questions, viz.:

(1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?

(2) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?

(3) Do you approve of the government and discipline of the Bible Presbyterian Church?

(4) Do you promise such subjection to your brethren as is taught in the Word of God?

(5) Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God, and a sincere desire to promote his glory in the Gospel of his Son?

(6) Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel, and the purity and peace of the Church; whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?

(7) Do you engage to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all private and personal duties, which become you as a Christian and a minister of the Gospel; as well as in all relative duties, and the

public duties of your office; endeavoring to adorn the profession of the Gospel by your conversation; and walking with exemplary piety before the flock over which God shall make you overseer?

(8) Are you now willing to take charge of this congregation, agreeably to your declaration when you accepted their call? And do you promise to discharge the duties of a pastor to them, as God shall give you strength?

13. The candidate having answered these questions in the affirmative, the presiding minister shall propose to the people the following questions:

(1) Do you, the people of this congregation, continue to profess your readiness to receive _____ whom you have called to be your minister?

(2) Do you promise to receive the word of truth from his mouth, with meekness and love; and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement, and obedience in the Lord, to which his office, according to the Word of God, and the Constitution of this Church, entitles him?

(3) Do you promise to encourage him in his arduous labor, and to assist his endeavors for your instruction and spiritual edification?

(4) And do you engage to continue with him, while he is your pastor, that competent worldly maintenance which you have promised; and whatever else you may see needful for the honor of religion, and his comfort among you?

14. The people having answered these questions in the affirmative, by holding up their right hands, the candidate shall kneel down in the most convenient part of the Church. Then the presiding minister, shall, by prayer, and with the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery, according to the apostolic example, solemnly ordain him to the holy office of the Gospel ministry. Prayer being ended, he shall rise from his knees; and the minister who presides shall first, and afterward all the members of the presbytery in their order, take him by the right hand, saying, in words to this purpose, "We give you the right hand of fellowship, to take part of this ministry with

us.” After which the minister presiding, or some other appointed for the purpose, shall give a solemn charge in the name of God, to the newly ordained minister, and to the people, to persevere in the discharge of their mutual duties, and shall then, by prayer, recommend them both to the grace of God, and his holy keeping. Finally, at the conclusion of the whole service, he shall dismiss the congregation with the usual blessing. And the Presbytery shall duly record the transaction.

15. As a candidate who has not received a call to be the pastor of a particular congregation may be called to engage in the work of the holy ministry, it is proper that he should be ordained, and, in this case, the last of the preceding questions shall be omitted, and the following used as a substitute, viz.:

“Are you now willing to undertake the work of the Christian ministry, and do you promise to discharge the duties which may be incumbent upon you in this character as God may give you strength?”

16. When an ordained minister of another denomination seeks admission to the Bible Presbyterian Church, the Presbytery to which he applies shall require him to give evidence of possessing the qualifications, in regard to piety, faith, and learning, which are demanded of candidates for ordination as given above; and it shall require him to answer affirmatively the questions appointed for the ordination of candidates in section 12 of this chapter.

CHAPTER XV

Of Removing a Minister from One Charge to Another

1. No minister shall be removed from one Church to another, nor shall he receive any call for that purpose, but by the permission of the presbytery.

2. Any Church, desiring to call a settled minister from his present charge, shall, by commissioners properly authorized, represent to the Presbytery the ground on which they plead his removal. The Presbytery, having maturely considered their plan, may, according as it appears more or less reasonable, either recommend to them to

desist from prosecuting the call, or may order it to be delivered to the minister to whom it is directed.

3. When the congregation calling any settled minister is within the limits of another Presbytery, that congregation shall obtain leave from the presbytery to which it belongs, to apply to the presbytery of which he is a member; and that presbytery, having cited him and his congregation as before directed, shall proceed to hear the cause and bring it to an issue. If it agrees to the translation, it shall release him from his present charge; and having given him proper testimonials, shall require him to repair to that presbytery, within the bounds of which the congregation calling him lies, that the proper steps may be taken for his regular settlement in that congregation; and the presbytery to which the congregation belongs, having received an authenticated certificate of his release, under the hand of the clerk of that presbytery, shall proceed to install him in the congregation, as soon as convenient. Provided always, that no minister shall be translated without his own consent previously obtained.

4. When any minister is to be settled in a congregation, the installation, which consists in constituting a pastoral relation between him and the people of that particular church, may be performed either by the presbytery, or by a committee appointed for that purpose, as may appear most expedient; and the following order shall be observed therein:

5. A day shall be appointed for the installation at such time as may appear most convenient, and due notice thereof given to the congregation.

6. When the presbytery, or committee, shall be convened and constituted, on the day appointed, a sermon shall be delivered by a minister previously appointed thereto; immediately after which, the minister who is to preside shall state to the congregation the design of the meeting, and briefly recite the proceedings of the presbytery relative thereto. And then, addressing himself to the minister to be installed, shall propose to him the following or similar questions:

(1) Are you now willing to take the charge of this congregation, as their pastor, agreeably to your declaration when you accepted its call?

(2) Do you conscientiously believe and declare, as far as you know your own heart, that in taking upon you this charge, you are influenced by a sincere desire to promote the glory of God, and the good of his Church?

(3) Do you solemnly promise, that, by the assistance of the grace of God, you will endeavour faithfully to discharge all the duties of a pastor to this congregation, and will be careful to maintain a deportment in all respects becoming a minister of the Gospel of Christ, agreeably to your ordination engagements?

Having received satisfactory answers to all these questions, he shall propose to the people the same or like questions as those directed under the head of ordination; which, having also been satisfactorily answered, by the holding up of the right hand in testimony of assent, he shall solemnly pronounce and declare the said minister to be regularly constituted the pastor of that congregation. A charge shall then be given to both parties, as directed in the case of ordination; and prayer shall be offered. At the conclusion of the whole service, the congregation shall be dismissed with the usual benediction.

7. It is highly becoming, that, after the installation, the heads of families of that congregation who are then present, or at least the elders and deacons, should come forward to their pastor, and give him their right hand in token of cordial reception and affectionate regard.

CHAPTER XVI

Of Resigning a Pastoral Charge

When any minister shall desire leave to resign his pastoral charge, the Presbytery shall cite the congregation to appear, by its commissioners, at its next meeting, to show cause why the Presbytery should not accept the resignation. If the congregation fail to appear, or if its reasons for retaining its pastor be deemed by the Presbytery insufficient, he shall have leave granted to resign his

pastoral charge, of which due record shall be made; and that Church shall be held to be vacant, till supplied again, in an orderly manner, with another minister; and if any congregation shall desire to be released from its pastor, a similar process, *mutatis mutandis*, shall be observed.

CHAPTER XVII

Of Moderators

1. It is equally necessary in the courts of the Church, as in other assemblies, that there should be a moderator; that the business may be conducted with order and dispatch.
2. The moderator is to be considered as possessing, by delegation from the whole body, all authority necessary for the preservation of order; for convening and adjourning the court; and directing its operations according to the rules of the Church. If the court be equally divided on any question he shall possess the casting vote. If he be not willing to decide, he shall put the question a second time; and if the court be again equally divided, and he decline to give his vote, the question shall be lost.
3. The moderator of the Presbytery shall be chosen from year to year, or for some shorter term, if the Presbytery may think best. The moderator of the General Synod shall be chosen at each meeting of that court: and the moderator of the preceding Synod, or, in the case of his absence, another member appointed for the purpose, shall open the next meeting with a sermon, and shall hold the chair until a new moderator be chosen.

CHAPTER XVIII

Of Clerks

Every court shall choose a clerk, to record its transactions, to serve for an indefinite term during the pleasure of the court. It shall be the duty of the clerk, besides recording the transactions, to preserve the records carefully; and to grant extracts from them, whenever properly required. Such extracts, under the hand of the clerk, shall

be evidence to any ecclesiastical court, and to every part of the Church.

CHAPTER XIX
Of Vacant Congregations
Assembling for Public Worship

1. Considering the great importance of weekly assembling the people, for the public worship of God, in order thereby to improve their knowledge; to confirm their habits of worship, and their desire of the public ordinances; to augment their reverence for the most high God; and to promote the charitable affections which unite men most firmly in society; it is recommended, that every vacant congregation meet together, on the Lord's Day, at one or more places, for the purpose of prayer, singing praises, and reading the Holy Scriptures, together with the works of such approved divines, as the Presbytery within whose bounds they are may recommend, and they may be able to procure; and that the elders be the persons who shall preside, and select the portions of Scripture, and of the other books to be read; and to see that the whole be conducted in a becoming and orderly manner.
2. Presbyteries may supervise vacant Churches within their bounds through a committee or committees appointed for this purpose, or through the moderators who have been appointed for the Sessions. Such supervision includes co-operation with the Session, or with any authorized committee of the particular Church, in the supply of the pulpit, and in the seeking and securing of a pastor.

CHAPTER XX
Of Incorporation and Corporations

1. The General Synod, the several Presbyteries and the several Churches may maintain corporations to handle affairs pertaining to property and other temporal matters, which do not come properly under the jurisdiction of the courts themselves.
2. Only communicant members of a particular Church in good and regular standing who are at least twenty-one years of age shall be

entitled to vote at corporation meetings of the particular Church; voting by proxy shall not be permitted, nor shall any one be allowed to vote except when the vote is being taken, subject to the laws of the State of incorporation.

3. The Board of Trustees of a particular Church shall consist of the acting, ruling elders in that church or, if the Church so elect, the acting ruling elders and the acting deacons in that Church. However, an exception to the above is permitted in the case of a church organized and established prior to its reception.

4. All particular Churches shall be entitled to hold, own, and enjoy their own local properties, without any right of reversion whatsoever to the Bible Presbyterian Church, its Presbyteries, Synods, or any other courts hereafter created, its trustees or other officers.

5. The provisions of this chapter are to be construed as a solemn covenant whereby the Church as a whole undertakes never to attempt to secure possession of the property of any congregation against its will, whether or not such congregation remains within or chooses to withdraw from this body. All officers and courts of the Church are hereby prohibited from making any such attempt. The provisions of sections 4 and 5 of this chapter are unamendable and irrevocable.

CHARTER XXI Of Amendments

1. Amendments or alterations to the Form of Government (except as provided in section 2 of this chapter), Book of Discipline, and Directory for Worship may be made only in the following manner: the General Synod, after due discussion, may propose changes to the presbyteries, but they shall not be regarded as having constitutional validity until they have been approved in writing by a majority of the Presbyteries before the next ensuing Synod; and it shall be the duty of the next ensuing Synod to declare that such changes have been adopted and are in effect. This does not apply to the Form of Government, Chapter XX, sections 4 and 5, which are

unamendable. Presbyteries may also overture the General Synod to send down suggested amendments to the Constitution.

2. Amendments or alterations of the Confession of Faith and Catechisms, and of the forms of subscription required of ministers, licentiates, ruling elders, and deacons, as these forms are found in the Form of Government, shall not be regarded as having constitutional validity unless sent down to the Presbyteries by a two-thirds vote of the General Synod, approved by two-thirds of the Presbyteries in writing, and finally adopted by a two-thirds vote of the General Synod next ensuing. Before any of the changes described in this section are proposed to the Presbyteries, the General Synod shall appoint a committee to consider the proposed changes and to report to the next Synod.

3. None of the provisions of section 2 of this chapter nor of this third section shall be modified except by the process which is set forth in section 2, with the further exception that those parts of the Constitution declared unamendable, cannot be changed in any lawful manner whatsoever.

CHARTER XXII

Indemnification of Ministers, Ruling Elders, Deacons, Employees, and Trustees of the General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church

1. The General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church shall indemnify, to the full extent authorized or permitted by the New York State Not-for-Profit Corporation Law and/or the New York State Religious Corporation Law and as permitted by the law of states in which the Synod shall have jurisdiction over Churches in association with the General Synod, Ministers, Ruling Elders, Deacons, Employees, and Trustees of the General Synod from and against any and all judgments, fines, amounts paid in settlement, and reasonable expenses, including attorney's fees, actually and necessarily incurred or imposed as a result of such action or proceeding, or any appeal therein, imposed upon or asserted against him by reason of being or having been a Minister, Ruling Elder, Deacon, Employee or Trustee of the

FORM OF GOVERNMENT

General Synod and acting within the scope of his official duties, but only when the determination shall have been made judicially or in the manner hereinafter provided that he acted in good faith for a purpose which he reasonably believed to be in the best interests of the General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church and, in the case of a criminal action or proceeding, in addition, had no reasonable cause to believe that his conduct was unlawful. This indemnification shall be made only if the General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church shall be advised by its Trustees acting:

- (1) by a quorum consisting of Trustees who are not parties to such action or proceeding upon a finding that, or
- (2) if a quorum under (1) is not obtainable with due diligence, upon the opinion in writing of independent legal counsel that the Minister, Ruling Elder, Deacon, Employee or Trustee of the General Synod have met the foregoing applicable standard of conduct.

If the foregoing determination is to be made by the Trusteed, such Trustees may rely, as to all questions of law, on the advice of independent legal counsel.

Every reference herein to a Minister, Ruling Elder, Deacon, Employee or Trustee shall include every Minister, Ruling Elder, Deacon, Employee or Trustee hereof or former Minister, Ruling Elder, Deacon, Employee or Trustee thereof. Indemnification shall apply to all the judgments, fines, amounts in settlement, and reasonable expenses described above, whenever arising, allowable as above-stated. The right of indemnification herein provided shall be in addition to any and all rights to which any Minister, Ruling Elder, Deacon, Employee or Trustee of the General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church might otherwise be entitled and the provisions herein shall neither impair, nor adversely affect such rights.

2. Expenses incurred in defending any proceeding may be advanced by the General Synod before the final disposition of the proceeding on receipt of an undertaking by or on behalf of

the Minister, Ruling Elder, Deacon, Employee or Trustee to repay the amount of the advance unless it is determined ultimately that the Minister, Ruling Elder, Deacon, Employee or Trustee is entitled to be indemnified as authorized in this chapter.

3. The Trustees may adopt a Resolution authorizing the purchase and maintenance of insurance on behalf of any Minister, Ruling Elder, Deacon, Employee or Trustee of the General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church against any liability asserted against or incurred by said agent of the General Synod in such capacity arising out of the agent's status as such, whether or not the General Synod would have the power to indemnify the agent.

Amended by the 63rd and 69th General Synods of the Bible Presbyterian Church.