

**CONSTITUTION and BY-LAWS  
ROCKY BAYOU BAPTIST CHURCH  
NICEVILLE, FLORIDA  
JUNE 4, 1989  
(modified January 1, 2003)**

**ARTICLE I - NAME AND AFFILIATION**

This body of Christian believers shall be known as the Rocky Bayou Baptist Church, meeting at 2401 North Partin Drive in Niceville, Florida. We are a Southern Baptist Church and a member of the Choctaw Baptist Association, the Florida Baptist Convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention.

**ARTICLE II - PURPOSE**

Our purpose is to glorify God. We desire to be the family of God which brings pleasure to our heavenly Father. This is accomplished through three primary ministries.

1. Worship - Worship is our direct ministry to God. God is glorified when His people worship Him out of sincere and obedient hearts.
2. Watchcare - Watchcare is our ministry to fellow believers. God is glorified when we demonstrate our love for one another through mutual ministry one to another. These ministries include teaching, discipling, encouraging, serving, extending mercy, admonishing, comforting, praying for one another, and all other New Testament reciprocal commands.
3. Witness - Witnessing is our ministry to the world. God is glorified when we seek to lead people to Christ through personal witnessing, lifestyle evangelism, and by supporting mission work at home and around the world.

**ARTICLE III - DOCTRINAL STATEMENT**

The Bible is the inspired Word of God and is the basis for any statement of faith. Our church subscribes to the Baptist Faith and Message as adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963, with one exception: rather than operating through democratic process we believe it to be biblically correct to function under the overseeing ministry of elders (Hebrews 13:17) described later in this

document. Though we believe the Bible to be our entire statement of faith, a representative doctrinal statement is printed below in order to aid current and prospective members in knowing what we believe.

1. We believe the entire Bible to be the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God and we seek to order our church and lives thereby.
2. We believe that there is one God, the creator of heaven and earth, who is an infinite and eternal Spirit and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. God exists in three persons - the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit.
3. We believe that Jesus is God who embodied human flesh. We believe in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His substitutionary atonement for man's sin on the cross of Calvary, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His future return in power and great glory.
4. We believe in the Holy Spirit, whose ministry to the world is the conviction of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment and whose indwelling ministry to the saints is the empowerment to live a godly life, dedicated to serving Christ and His Church.
5. We believe one receives the Holy Spirit by believing on Christ (John 7:37-39; Acts 2:38; Acts 11:15-17; Romans 8:9). Jesus Christ is the one who baptizes us with the Spirit (Matthew 3:11-12). To be baptized with the Holy Spirit means that Christ places us by means of the Spirit, in union with Himself and His church (I Corinthians 12:12-13). The evidence of having received the Holy Spirit is the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Though the baptism with the Spirit is a one-time experience, the filling with the Spirit is a repeated reality as we live so as not to grieve or quench the Spirit.
6. We believe in salvation by God's grace through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross. We believe this new birth is the result of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit and is evidenced by a changed life, submitted to the Lordship of Christ. All those saved by God will endure to the end and will never be cast out.
7. We believe that at the end of time the dead will be raised and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unsaved will be consigned to hell and the righteous will dwell forever in heaven with the Lord.

8. We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in the Lord Jesus who is the head of the Church.

## **ARTICLE IV - CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

### Section I - Purpose

Church membership is a helpful tool for the practical outworking of the covenant relationship between believers. This covenant relationship is established when the believers are immersed by the Spirit into the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13). Church membership is not the entering into covenant. Rather, the covenant is entered into when faith in Christ is exercised. In Christ, believers already belong to one another. Church membership underscores the reality of that relationship and facilitates its practical outworking.

Church membership, as a tool, is helpful and necessary to provide Christ-like watchcare over individuals and over the body as a whole. Membership facilitates:

- A. Defining who belongs to our local fellowship,
- B. Knowing who is entitled to the privileges and responsibilities of our local fellowship,
- C. Providing adequate watchcare and shepherding for every individual belonging to us, and
- D. Exercising authority in discipline and restoration of the wayward among us.

### Section 2 - Nature

The nature of any fellowship of believers is to love, accept, forgive, and minister to one another even as God has already done for each of us through Jesus Christ. We are to encourage one another, provide teaching and ministry opportunities, and make available other resources to help one another grow into all the fullness of God. In this way we will fulfill the ministry He has already ordained for each of us to carry out.

### Section 3 - Qualifications

The membership of the church shall consist of persons professing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, having followed Him in believer's baptism by immersion, being committed to obey God's Word, and adopting the statement of faith and practice held by this church.

#### Section 4 - Requirements

Membership in this church will be confirmed after the following has been accomplished:

- A. Attend a prospective member seminar.
- B. Sign the following statement of faith and commitment:

By the grace of God and through repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I have become a child of God. I am therefore committed to obeying Him. In obedience to Jesus Christ and by becoming a member of RBBC, I commit to this church body to receive watchcare, to serve in her ministry, and to complete the new member orientation process.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

- C. Baptism (If not previously baptized by immersion.)

#### Section 5 - Receiving Members

Persons may be received for membership in the following ways:

- A. Profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and believer's baptism by immersion.
- B. Transfer of membership from another New Testament church. Christians who have not experienced believer's baptism by immersion will be so baptized.
- C. Statement of faith and of believer's baptism by immersion (when no church membership record is available).

The purpose of baptism is two fold: It is an act of obedience (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:38) and, it identifies the believer with Jesus. It symbolizes death (you died with Christ), burial (your old life has been put away), and resurrection (you have been raised to new life in Christ). Immersion is the only mode of baptism which illustrates this truth. However, it has no saving merit.

## Section 6 - Responsibility

By joining this church, members are committing themselves to give and receive spiritual watchcare within the fellowship and to serve in the ministry of the church. Every member is responsible for working to build up Christ's church (I Peter 4:10).

Every member is important to this church and is responsible for being informed concerning the ministries and other affairs of the church. Each member is responsible to seek the Lord when decision-making matters are brought to the congregation. Each member must work to maintain purity, unity, and love in the fellowship.

## Section 7 – New Member Orientation

New members are to complete a series of courses to learn or review the foundational teachings of the Christian faith and to assimilate new members into the life and work of the church. The new member orientation is a prerequisite for serving in a teaching or ministry leadership position.

## Section 8 - Termination of Membership

Membership in this church may be terminated in any of the following ways:

- A. Death
- B. When a member joins another church.
- C. When a member moves outside the community area for more than 18 months. This is to encourage members to become active in another part of the Body of Christ while away. Membership may be restored by the elders upon their return without membership classes being repeated. Exceptions to this termination may be made for the elderly or otherwise incapacitated members who must go elsewhere to live but who are unable to attend another church.
- D. When a person presents a written expression to terminate, providing disciplinary action is not in process for an offense against the Body of Christ. Where disciplinary action is in process, it shall be carried through to its conclusion.

- E. The elders may terminate the membership of anyone who becomes an offense to this church and the Body of Christ by unscriptural conduct. This termination may be carried out only after faithful effort has been made to bring the said member to repentance and restitution (Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1).
- F. This church does not continue church membership on an indefinite basis for members who do not participate in the fellowship. Members who do not participate for one year or longer, unless physically hindered, will be considered to be in violation of Hebrews 10:25; and, therefore, will be subject to the discipline described under number "5" above.

### Section 9 - Restoration of Membership

A person excluded from the fellowship and removed from membership for an offense against the Body of Christ shall be restored to fellowship upon satisfactory evidence of repentance presented to the elders.

## **ARTICLE V - GOVERNMENT**

In the scriptures, those who have the responsibility for the spiritual rule and care of the church are called pastors (Ephesians 4:11), elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17), and overseers (I Timothy 3:1, NAS or bishop, KJV). These different titles are used to refer to the same office of spiritual leadership. The Bible teaches that the congregation is spiritually accountable to the elders and the elders are accountable to God (Hebrews 13:17).

Therefore, the decision-making authority of the church is vested in the elders who function under the Lordship of Christ. They shall function not as dictators, but as humble leaders who are sensitive to God and to the needs of the church. The members of the church fill an important role in assisting the elders in reaching decisions. For all substantial church decisions the membership shall be fully informed and shall be given opportunity to review and offer input on such matters. Convictions related to decision-making matters may be indicated by written form when such matters are brought to the congregation. Appeals can be made to the elders by members of the congregation when decisions are being made, or when necessary, after decisions have been made (See Article VI, Section 8). Good communication between the elders and church members is essential.

## **ARTICLE VI - ELDERS**

### Section 1 - Qualifications

- A. Elders shall be men who are members of this church and who meet the qualifications listed in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. They must be able to teach God's word and be called by God to serve in this ministry. The character and faithfulness of the elder's wife are just as important as that of the elder.
- B. Elders shall be examples to the other believers. They shall exemplify commitment and availability to the fellowship. Their commitment shall include faithfulness to Sunday Bible study, all church-wide worship gatherings, and participation in the outreach ministry of the church.
- C. Elders shall be faithful in giving financially to support the Lord's work through our church. Elders, as well as all Christians, should practice the principles of giving found in the New Testament. They should give generously (II Corinthians 8:2), sacrificially (II Corinthians 8:2), out of love rather than by law (II Corinthians 8:8), cheerfully (II Corinthians 9:7), regularly (I Corinthians 16:1-2), and it should represent a worthy investment with God (Matthew 6:19-21, 24, and Luke 6:38).
- D. Elders should be supportive of the church, always working to build unity and love.

### Section 2 - Number

The number of elders shall be as many as are qualified and needed to carry out the duties of an elder.

### Section 3 - Selection

The elders will select any additional elders or replacement elders when it becomes obvious that God has called out men to serve in this ministry. The prospective elder will be questioned to confirm his call and willingness to serve. The name of each prospective elder will be presented to the church, inviting response concerning any question of the qualifications of each man. Any questions will be appropriately reviewed. After a period of not less than three weeks, the elders shall present each approved older to the church for the setting apart of each man to the office of elder.

#### Section 4 - Leading Elder

The elders shall select from among themselves a man to be a leading elder. His responsibilities will be to serve as the chairman of the elders, to moderate church conferences, and to serve as a spokesman for the elders. The Leading elder has no more authority than the other elders.

#### Section 5 - Term of Office

The term of office for an elder shall be as long as he is qualified, capable, and desiring to fulfill the duties of an elder.

#### Section 6 - Removal From Office

Any elder may be removed from office if he becomes physically incapacitated, spiritually unqualified, or his inability to serve is established by the remainder of the elders. Any accusations and/or action against an elder must be in accordance with I Timothy 5:19-20.

#### Section 7 - Meetings

Meetings of elders shall be scheduled and held on a regular basis as determined by the elders. Anyone desiring to approach the elders on any matter or need may feel free to arrange to meet with them.

#### Section 8 - Decision-Making Process

Decisions shall be reached, after prayerful consideration, by unanimous vote in the spirit of humility with each elder regarding one another as more important than himself.

The elders may choose to poll the conviction and desires of the church when making certain decisions. This may especially be true when decisions involve calling new ministerial staff, change in church direction, new buildings, annual budget, non-budgeted expenditures which require substantial funds, or new ministries which require the participation of the fellowship.

When the church is asked to be involved in the decision being made by the elders, each member will be asked to indicate one of the following choices:

- A. I have prayed through this decision and I do believe it is God's will for us at this time.
- B. I have prayed through this decision, but I do not have any direction. I will, however, joyfully submit to the direction God has given others.
- C. I have not prayed through this decision. I will, however, joyfully submit to the direction God has given others.
- D. I have prayed through this decision and I do not believe it is God's will for us at this time.

When the church is not unified in the decision being made, elders will meet with those not in agreement to hear their reasons, thoughts, and appeals. After prayer and sharing together every effort will be made to reach unity. Every member's input is important even if he is in the minority. In the Old Testament, Caleb and Joshua were in the minority, but they were the ones who heard God. Israel followed the other ten spies and they missed God's will. The elders are responsible to pray, weighing all matters, and then determine what is God's will. Every member of the fellowship may at some time be faced with the need to submit to a decision with which you may not fully agree. But through it all, we must all work to maintain love and avoid obstinance and disunity. The attitudes in I Corinthians 13 will always be our model for maintaining healthy relationships.

### Section 9 - Responsibilities

- A. Shepherd the church by feeding God's Word, leading, and protecting (Acts 20:28-30).
- B. Oversee the affairs of the church (Acts 20:28).
- C. Preaching and teaching God's Word (II Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9; I Timothy 3:2; I Timothy 5:17).
- D. Maintaining doctrinal purity (Acts 15; Titus 1:9).
- E. Decisions regarding distributions of church offerings (Acts 4:37; 11:30).
- F. Examples to the flock and willing to serve (I Peter 5:2-3).
- G. Pray for the sick (James 5:14).
- H. Appoint other elders (Titus 1:5).

- I. Prayer and ministry of the Word of God (Acts 6:4). (The ministry of the apostles apparently became the ministry of the elders.)
- J. The elders shall be given authority to function as "officers of the corporation" or appoint officers of the corporation in all legal matters related to the state of Florida.

## **ARTICLE VII - DEACONS**

### Section 1 - Qualifications

- A. Deacons shall be men who are members of this church and who meet the qualifications listed in I Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-4. The character and faithfulness of the deacon's wife is just as important as that of the deacon.
- B. Deacons shall be examples to the other believers. They shall exemplify commitment and availability to the fellowship. Their commitment shall include faithfulness to Sunday Bible study, all church-wide worship gatherings, and participation in the outreach ministry of the church.
- C. Deacons shall be faithful in giving financially to support the Lord's work through our church, following the biblical principles for giving listed in Article VI, Section 1,C.
- D. Deacons shall be supportive of the church and her elders, always working to build unity and love.

### Section 2 - Number

The number of deacons shall be as many as are qualified and needed to carry out the duties of the deacons.

### Section 3 - Selection

The elders shall select the deacons, choosing men who have a servant's heart and who already are functioning as servants in the church. Each prospective deacon will be questioned to confirm his call to the ministry of deacon and his willingness to serve. The name of each prospective deacon will be presented to the church, inviting response concerning any questions of the qualifications of each man. Any questions will be appropriately reviewed. After a period of not less than three weeks, the elders shall present each approved deacon to the

church for the setting apart of each man to the office of deacon. They shall begin to serve immediately.

#### Section 4 - Term Of Office

The term of office for a deacon shall be as long as he is qualified, capable, and desiring to fulfill the duties of a deacon.

#### Section 5 - Removal From Office

Any deacon may be removed from office if he becomes spiritually unqualified or his inability to serve is established by the elders.

#### Section 6 - Meetings

Meetings of deacons shall be scheduled and held on a regular basis as determined by the deacons. Any desiring to approach the deacons on any matter or need may feel free to arrange to meet with them.

#### Section 7 - Decision-Making Process

Decisions shall be reached after prayerful consideration, by unanimous vote, in the spirit of humility with each deacon regarding one another as more important than himself.

#### Section 8 - Responsibilities

Deacons are the leading servants in Christ's church. The Greek word for deacon, "diakonos" means "servant". They are responsible for taking care of the affairs of the church, as designated by the elders (Acts 6:1-4). The responsibilities of the deacons include, but are not limited to, those listed below. Other members of the church may perform or assist with these responsibilities, but the deacons are responsible to see that the tasks are accomplished.

- A. Assist the elders in the shepherding of the church.
- B. Upkeep of the church buildings and grounds.
- C. Opening and securing of buildings, and assisting with pre-service set-up needs.

- D. Counting and securing offerings.

### **ARTICLE VIII - SELECTION OF SENIOR PASTOR**

The elders, or any committee duly appointed by them, shall have the authority to make the selection of a senior pastor. The name of the prospective pastor shall be presented by the elders to the church, inviting response and questions by the congregation. The church shall be included in the calling of a senior pastor using the decision-making process described in Article VI, Section 8. Due to the responsibilities and ministry of the senior pastor (preaching, coordination of ministries, overseeing staff, etc.), he shall, upon confirmation of his call, be appointed as an elder in accordance with the qualification in Article VI, Section 1.

### **ARTICLE IX - SELECTION OF OTHER PASTORS AND STAFF**

The senior pastor, together with any assistance he may ask, has the selection of other pastors and staff. His selection is subject to the approval of the elders. The church shall be included in the calling of other pastors and staff using the decision-making process described in Article VI, Section 8. These pastors and staff will not automatically be appointed as elders. Those who qualify may be selected as elders under the guidelines for elders in Article VI.

### **ARTICLE X - COMMITTEES**

Committees shall be established by the deacons or elders. These committees can function in an "as needed" or on a continual basis.

### **ARTICLE XI - MEETINGS**

- A. Assemblies

Regular assemblies for the purpose of worship, fellowship, teaching, and edification shall be held as the elders direct.

- B. Business Meetings

The membership shall meet annually in business session to be informed, updated on the previous year, and make decisions on previously announced concerns. Special meetings may be called at any time by the elders for discussion and/or action on pressing concerns. Interim reports may be given at any regular assembly as requested.

### **ARTICLE XIII-FINANCES**

An annual budget shall be presented by the elders to the church for review and discussion. A monthly financial summary and quarterly statements shall be made available to the congregation. The financial books of the church shall always be open for examination by any church member. The elders of the church shall not own any church buildings or church properties nor may they liquidate them for personal gain. Should Rocky Bayou Baptist Church ever cease to exist as an organized church, all church assets shall be dissolved and dispersed using the decision-making process described in this document.