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# **Bylaws**

## **Preamble**

WHEREAS, it is the express purpose of God our Heavenly Father to call out of the world a people purified for His own possession, who constitute the Body of Christ, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the Cornerstone.

WHEREAS, the members of the Body of Christ are enjoined to assemble themselves together for worship, instruction in the Scripture, fellowship, counsel, and the work of ministry, and for the exercise of those spiritual gifts and offices provided for in the New Testament, therefore,

BEITRESOLVED, that we recognize ourselves as a local Body of Christian disciples and do hereby adopt these bylaws as our articles of governance as we work together to bring glory to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the spread of Gospel, and that under the laws of the State of New York we may exercise all the rights and privileges granted to religious bodies.

## **Article I Name**

The name of this church shall be Church of the Vine, Inc.

## **Article II Purpose**

This church will exist for the glory of God, and to that end we will strive by gathering together for worship, receiving instruction from Scripture, fellowshiping and serving one another, preaching the gospel to all people, serving the community, supporting missions, ordaining ministers, planting churches, establishing and overseeing places of worship, and engaging in activities which are necessary, suitable or convenient for the accomplishment of these things, or which are incidental thereto, or connected therewith, consistent with Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. This corporation is organized and operated exclusively for religious purposes within the meaning of Section 501(c)(3), Internal Revenue Code.

## **Article III Membership**

### **Section 1 Process of Membership**

Each prospective member must have been a regular attendee of the church services for at least three (3) months, give evidence of his/her faith in Jesus Christ as his/her only Savior and Lord, agree to submit to the teaching of Scripture as expressed in the Statement of Faith, and promise to keep the commitments expressed in the Church Covenant.

An individual seeking to become a member of this church must submit in writing that they wish to become a member. The applicant must include the following information with their request:

- A. The name of the applicant must be listed.
- B. There must be a statement attesting that the member meets all prerequisite requirements.

The Board of Elders shall be responsible for assessing each person's qualifications for membership and shall recommend the prospective member to the church who will then approve or disapprove of by a two-thirds vote.

### **Section 2 Privileges of Membership**

Our church consists of its members. In accordance with the commitments listed in the Church Covenant, each member shall be privileged and expected to participate in, and contribute to, the life and ministry of the church.

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 Board of Elders).

Voting is limited to those individuals that have been fully accepted into membership and whose status as a member is active. Binding decisions made by this church shall be decided by a two-thirds majority vote of the membership.

### **Section 3 Termination of Membership**

The Board of Elders reserves the right to remove, without warning, any member who is deemed to be harming the church or to be in purpose and willful contention with the church. Reasons for removal include:

- A. Voluntary withdrawal from membership
- B. Deceased
- C. Propagation of doctrines and practices contrary to the Tenets of Faith (Romans 16:17, 18; Galatians 1:8, 9; Titus 3:9-11; II Thessalonians 3:6).
- D. Living in sin or in a manner which is inconsistent with Biblical standards of holiness (I Corinthians 5:11; Galatians 5:19-21; Hebrews 12:14).

The Board of Elders shall be authorized to revise the membership roll of the church as needed.

Any person who may have been terminated as a member shall be notified of this action in writing and shall have the right to appeal to the Board of Elders for reconsideration of said action.

The members of the church may vote to restore to membership any person previously excluded, upon request of the excluded person, evidence of the excluded person's repentance and reformation, and by recommendation of the Board of Elders (II Corinthians 2:6-8).

## **Article IV Offices**

### **Section 1 Summary**

The offices of our church shall be elder and deacon (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1–13). In addition, our church recognizes the administrative positions of secretary and treasurer. All officers must be members of this church prior to assuming their responsibilities.

### **Section 2 Elders**

*Role.* An elder must devote time to prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4). Elders are to be seen as God's gift to the church for shepherding the flock, teaching the Scripture, and equipping the saints for ministry (Eph. 4:11-12; Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet. 5:1–4). Elders shall share the responsibility, delegated to them by the congregation, to organize as a council to oversee the life, ministry, and resources of the church.

*Qualifications.* Any prospective elder must be man who meets the qualifications for elders described in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9. A prospective elder must be examined and recommended by the Board of Elders, and shall be installed as an elder, upon a two-thirds vote of the church membership, and recognized as an ordained minister by virtue of this process.

### **Section 3 Lead Pastor**

The Lead Pastor shall be an elder. The Lead Pastor is specifically set apart by the members of our church to labor in preaching and teaching the Word (1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Cor. 9:14). The Lead Pastor shall be part of, and work with the Board of Elders to oversee and shepherd the church.

### **Section 4 Associate Pastor**

An associate pastor shall be an elder. The associate pastor(s) shall be part of, and work with the Board of Elders in overseeing and shepherding the church, and shall assist the Lead Pastor in preaching and teaching.

The Board of Elders shall nominate an associate pastor to be the successor of the Lead Pastor. In the event that the Lead Pastor is absent or incapacitated for an extended and indefinite period of time, the successor shall assume the role of the Lead Pastor upon a two-thirds majority vote of the church membership.

### **Section 5 Deacons**

Deacons shall meet the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3:8–13. Deacons shall assist the elders by serving to support ministries of the church, care for the church, and perform certain administrative functions. Specific deacon positions shall be established by the Board of Elders.

### **Section 6 Secretary**

The Secretary shall be a spiritually minded person and of sound judgment. The Secretary shall keep a true and accurate record of all meetings. The Secretary shall be nominated by the Board of Elders and appointed by a two-thirds majority vote of the church membership.

### **Section 7 Treasurer**

The Treasurer shall be a spiritually minded person, of sound business judgment, who shall be capable of doing the accounting required to maintain the church books. The Treasurer shall keep an itemized account of all receipts and disbursements of moneys committed to their trust and shall make reports to be presented during member's meetings. The Treasurer shall be nominated by the Board of Elders and appointed by a two-thirds majority vote of the church membership.

### **Section 8 Terms of Office**

The term for all offices, except for Lead Pastor and Associate Pastor(s), shall be reaffirmed on an annual basis by a two-thirds majority vote of the church membership. The number of consecutive terms that an officer may serve is unlimited.

The offices of Lead Pastor and Associate Pastor(s) shall not be subject to the annual reaffirmation. However, should any officer, including the Lead Pastor and/or Associate Pastor(s) be found in violation of the Statement of Faith, Church Covenant, or Bylaws the members of the church may dismiss him by a two-thirds majority vote.

## **Article V Meetings**

### **Section 1 Worship Meetings**

Worship meeting shall be held on the Lord's Day, and may be held throughout the week on any day(s) the church determines.

## **Section 2 Member's Meetings**

The Board of Elders will call member's meetings to discuss the direction of the church. The Board of Elders shall set dates and times for member meetings. The membership may have invited guests present at any meeting upon approval of the Board of Elders.

Binding decisions made by our church shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of the membership present at any member's meeting.

The Secretary shall keep an accurate account of the minutes that were discussed at any member's meeting. He then must submit them at the next meeting for discussion and approval by the church membership. Upon approval by the church membership, the minutes shall be adopted, and all policy and procedure in them will continue to be enforced.

## **Article VI Quorum**

Two-thirds of the board members (including the Lead Pastor) at an official board meeting constitutes a quorum.

Two-thirds of the corporate membership (including the Lead Pastor) at an official church member's meeting constitutes a quorum.

## **Article VII Ecclesiastical Authority**

This church is theocratic in government. In any congregation, there will be people at all stages of spiritual growth and maturity. For that reason, it is not proper to submit all affairs of the church to a democratic vote, for the purpose of the church is not to do the will of the majority, but the will of God.

Any disputes that arise over the interpretation of these Bylaws, doctrine, or matters of faith, shall be deferred to the highest ecclesiastical authority of this church. In this case it is the Elders.

In *Watson v. Jones*, the court ruled that: "Whenever the questions of discipline, or of faith, of ecclesiastical rule, custom, or law have been decided by the highest church judicatory to which the matter has been carried, the legal tribunals must accept such decisions as final, and as binding on them . . ."

## **Article VIII Mutual Interest**

The behavior of anyone in fellowship with this church is of common interest to the Board of Elders and membership. This church requires every member to adhere to a lifestyle that is

consistent with the doctrines of this church as taught in Scripture. Therefore, this church reserves the right to refuse service to any individual, whether member or not, that is not submitting their lifestyle to this Scriptural mode of conduct. This refusal includes services, benefits, and any use of church assets.

## **Article IX Prohibited Activities**

This church is prohibited from engaging in activities which violate its written doctrines. This church is also prohibited from condoning, promoting or allowing any of its assets to be used for activities that violate its written doctrines.

## **Article X Review of Church Records**

### **Section 1 Requests Made by Congregant**

To ensure the trust of the congregants and to also ensure that a public interest is being served, church records and basic financial information may be available for congregational inspection and review. At no time may information be supplied that would violate any article of this constitution. Any questions by any congregant shall be addressed to the Board of Elders either in writing or by scheduled appointment.

### **Section 2 Required Provisions of the Request**

The request must state the name of the individual, the reason for the request and that the information shall in no way be made public or shared with any other congregant in a way that will jeopardize the church.

### **Section 3 Required Fee**

This corporation may require a reasonable per page fee for any copies that are required in order to accommodate approved records requests.

### **Section 4 Confidentiality**

In order to keep the records of the church confidential, records shall not be released to any outside agency, person or entity unless due process has been served and a certified subpoena has been personally delivered. This includes the IRS, except under the provisions of Section 7611 which shall be limited only to information deemed to be relevant to the inquiry being made. At all times the IRS will be expected to comply with all of the provisions of Section 7611.

### **Section 5 Denying a Request**

The Board of Elders reserves the right to deny such a request for any of the following reasons: 1) The request is considered by the Board of Elders and deemed to be frivolous 2) The individual making the request has a history of divisiveness 3) The individual does not

adequately provide the required information on the request as stated in this Article 4) The person making a request is not a regular attendee or contributor to the church.

## **Article XI Privacy**

This church shall diligently watch to keep private all records concerning polity, doctrine, counseling and information on individuals in fellowship with this church. This church must not disclose any records that may compromise information about a member's attendance, membership status, giving and/or counseling records.

## **Article XII Order**

For the purpose of conducting business, the Lead Pastor shall, in an orderly manner, preside over all of the affairs of the church.

## **Article XIII Finances**

### **Section 1 Audit**

The Treasurer and Board of Elders shall complete an internal audit. This audit of all financial records shall be made after the close of the calendar year, prior to the end of February.

### **Section 2 Checks, Payments, and Withdrawals**

The Board of Elders of Church of the Vine, Inc. shall adopt a Corporate Expenditures Policy detailing the procedure for properly executing checks, payments and withdrawals.

### **Section 3 Salaries**

All salaries and/or compensation packages shall be created by the Board of Elders. However, only uncompensated elders shall have a vote in approving those salaries and/or compensation packages.

All salaries shall be reviewed each year by the Board of Elders and shall be disclosed at the annual member meeting at which finances are discussed.

## **Article XIV Property Rights**

All property, real or chattel, shall be taken, held, sold, transferred or conveyed in the church's name. No real or chattel property of the corporation shall be sold, leased, mortgaged, or otherwise alienated without authorization of the Lead Pastor. The Lead Pastor of the church shall certify in such conveyances, leases, or mortgages.

## **Article XV Dissolution**



In the event that this church ceases to exist, all assets of this church shall, at the discretion of the Board of Elders, be distributed to a like-minded church or ministry, or for one or more exempt purposes within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code. Any such assets not disposed of shall be disposed of by a court of competent jurisdiction in the county in which the principal office of the church is then located, exclusively for such purposes or to such church, as said Court shall determine, which are organized and operated exclusively for such purposes.

#### **Article XIV Indemnification**

This church shall, to the extent legally permissible, indemnify each person who may serve or who has served at any time as an officer, elder, or employee of the church against all expenses and liabilities, including, without limitation, counsel fees, judgments, fines, excise taxes, penalties and settlement payments, reasonably incurred by or imposed upon such person in connection with any threatened, pending or completed action, suit or proceeding in which he or she may become involved by reason of his or her service in such capacity; provided that no indemnification shall be provided for any such person with respect to any matter as to which he or she shall have been finally adjudicated in any proceeding not to have acted in good faith in the reasonable belief that such action was in the best interests of the corporation; and further provided that any compromise or settlement payment shall be approved by a majority vote of a quorum of Elders who are not at that time parties to the proceeding.

#### **Article XV Amendments**

Amendments to the Bylaws may be proposed by the Board of Elders and approved by a two-thirds majority vote of the church membership.

#### **Article XVI Statement of Faith**

##### **Scripture**

The Bible, consisting of 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books, is the inspired, self-authenticating Word of God and is true in all that it teaches (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). The Bible is the supreme authority for faith and practice through which God has made Himself and His salvation known (Heb. 4:12).

##### **God**

There is one God (Isa. 45:5) who eternally exists as a Trinity of three distinct Persons in one essence; Father (Matt. 6:9), Son (Tit. 2:13), and Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4). God is the Creator, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all things, to whom all love, worship, and glory is due (Rom. 11:36; 1 Tim. 1:17; Jude 25)

Father. The Father is the source of all things (1 Cor. 8:6). He is sovereign over all eternity and all events therein (Prov. 16:33; Eph. 1:4). He is the Person through whom redemption was planned (John 3:16; Ro. 3:25; Eph. 1:9-10).

Son. The Son is the fully divine (John 1:14; 20:28; Tit. 2:13; Rom. 9:5, 10:9; 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 John 5:20) co-creator, co-sustainer, and heir of all things (Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2). He is the decisive revelation of the Father (2 Cor. 4:6; Heb. 1:2) through whom redemption was accomplished (Heb. 12:2)

Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a fully divine person of the Trinity (Acts 5:3-4) who inspired the writing of Scripture (2 Pet. 1:21), regenerates the elect (John 3:5; Tit. 3:5), facilitates sanctification (Rom. 15:16; 2 Cor. 3:18), and provides assurance of salvation in Christ (Gal. 4:6; 1 John 3:24). The Spirit also ploughs the hearts unbelievers by convicting them of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). Thus, the Spirit is the person through whom redemption is applied.

## **Mankind**

Though made in the image of God, man fell from his original innocence becoming totally depraved (Jer. 17:9), alienated from God (Col. 1:21), and proper objects of God's wrath (Eph. 2:3; 5:6; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 1:10; Heb. 3:11; 4:3). All people have inherited this corrupt nature and have fallen short of God's standard themselves. Therefore, all people stand guilty before God, deserving the full weight of His justice (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22).

## **The Gospel**

The Gospel is the good news that God has acted through the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus to inaugurate the Kingdom of God, to reconcile the world to Himself, and to restore all things (1 Cor. 1:1-5; 2 Cor. 5:18-19). The Gospel is the core of Christianity which gives support to all biblical teaching and practice.

## **Salvation**

God's offer of salvation is by His grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Mankind is saved from eternal damnation and given eternal life (Rom 6:23), not by any inherent worth or merit of his own, but by the grace God (Ephesians 2:8-9) through conscious faith in Jesus Christ alone (John 14:6). No alternate avenue to salvation exists (Acts 4:12).

When one repents and believes the Gospel he is united to Christ and thereby acquitted of his guilt before God and credited the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 3:121-26; 2 Cor. 5:21). Accordingly, the Holy Spirit indwells every genuine believer, affecting His new birth and causing him to be a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Titus 3:5). The Holy Spirit progressively sanctifies the believer by facilitating spiritual growth and maturity (2 Thess. 2:13) until the

consummation of redemptive history when believers will be given an incorruptible body (1 Cor. 15:52-54).

### **The Church**

The Church is comprised of all persons who are united in Christ's body through faith in the Gospel. The Church is visible in local congregations where God is worshipped (1 Pet. 2:9), where Biblical truth is preserved (Jude 1:3), and where believers are equipped for ministry (Eph. 4:12).

The biblical offices of the church are Elder and Deacon. Elders in the local church are to be men who meet the qualifications as set forth in Scripture (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9; 1 Tim. 3:8-13; 1 Tim. 2:12). Deacons likewise, are to meet the qualifications as set forth in Scripture (1 Tim. 3:8-13; Acts 6:1-6).

### **Ordinances**

Baptism involves the immersion of a believer in water; an act which serves to symbolically identify that believer with Christ. The believer is buried (immersed) in the likeness of Christ's death, and raised (from the water) in the likeness of Christ's resurrection. Baptism further symbolizes a believer's death to the old sinful life, and his resurrection to a new life in Christ (Rom. 6:3-4). The Lord's Supper is a reverent, symbolic act whereby believers memorialize the death of Christ (Luke 22:19). Unbelievers who take the Lord's Supper are grave danger (1 Cor. 11:28-30).

### **Last Things**

The world awaits the return of Christ (Acts 1:11) when He will judge all men (Rev. 20:5) and consummate His eternal Kingdom in a new heavens and new earth. Those who have not believed in Christ will be consigned to eternal destruction, while those who have believed in Christ will enjoy fellowship with God forever in His new creation (Matt. 13:42; 2 Thess. 1:19) where the glory of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_