

# James River Community Church

## CONSTITUTION

### PREAMBLE

In gratitude to God for the gift of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, believing that the task is to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything Jesus has commanded us; and that the church, though requiring some organization, is basically a living organism, having Christ as its Head and individual Christians as members making up the Body, we, therefore, do covenant together to abide by this Constitution for the furtherance of our Lord's Kingdom.

### ARTICLE I - NAME

The name of this church is James River Community Church, located at 8909 Eclipse Drive, Suffolk, Virginia 23433.

### ARTICLE II – POLITY AND AFFILIATION

James River Community Church is representative in its form of government. The officers of the church shall consist of the Pastor, Elders, and Deacons.

This church is a member of the Consortium of Tidewater Churches which includes the following sister churches: Chesapeake Community Chapel, Peninsula Community Chapel, Tabernacle Church of Norfolk, Virginia Beach Community Chapel and the Williamsburg Community Chapel and such churches as shall from time to time be added or removed officially by the Consortium. The church is independently owned and governed.

### ARTICLE III - PURPOSE

**James River Community Church exists to know Christ and to make Him known.**

Further, the purpose of this church is to glorify God by manifesting His life and work in the ministry of reconciliation, known today as the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). This purpose is to be achieved by leading people to establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and enabling those who do to grow toward maturity in Christ through meaningful worship, learning, mutual care, fellowship and service.

This church shall seek to develop spiritual maturity in each of its members by leading them into:

- 1.** An appreciation and vital experience of the corporate, family, and personal worship of God.
- 2.** A consciousness of God as the supreme reality in human experience, a personal relationship with Him through Christ and a sense of moral responsibility to Him.
- 3.** An understanding and appreciation of the personality, life and teachings of Jesus Christ; an experience of Him as Savior from sin, friend, companion and Lord; and loyalty to Him in daily life and conduct.
- 4.** A knowledge and experience of the person and work of the Holy Spirit as comforter, teacher, guide, and source of power.
- 5.** A knowledge of and about the Bible and skill in the use of the Bible as the inspired Word of God and final authority in faith and conduct.
- 6.** An appreciation of the meaning and importance of our Lord's Great Commission to "...Go and make disciples of all the nations..." (Mt. 28:18-20) especially as it relates to multiplying individuals and churches, at home and abroad as the God-ordained means of world evangelization.
- 7.** An appreciation of the nature and function of the Body of Christ, the Church, and knowledge related to participation in its life, including the function and place of spiritual gifts.
- 8.** An appreciation of the nurture and function of the Christian home and the desire and ability to participate constructively in its life and responsibility.
- 9.** An appreciation of the nature and function of civil government and an intelligent and scriptural participation as a Christian citizen in the community, state, and world.
- 10.** A progressive and continual development of individual Christ-like character.
- 11.** An enthusiastic and worthy participation in being witnesses for Jesus Christ in all areas of life, by both word and deed, at home and abroad.
- 12.** A Christian interpretation of life and the universe, and a commitment to a Christian worldview built on that interpretation.

## **ARTICLE IV – STATEMENT OF FAITH**

### **GOD**

We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **JESUS**

We believe in the deity of Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life; in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT**

We believe that for salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.

### **SIN**

We believe that all men, beginning with Adam, have rebelled, sinned against God and are eternally marred by sin and its consequences. For these reasons, mankind is incapable of pleasing or having a productive relationship with God without having a supernatural spiritual rebirth.

### **SALVATION**

We believe that salvation from the penalty of our sin can only be attained through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who forgives our sin and declares us righteous by His grace. Saving faith is always accompanied by true repentance. Because of God's sustaining power, every true believer will persevere to the end.

### **THE BIBLE**

We believe that the Bible, consisting of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, is the Word of God, that it is without error, and serves as the final authority for our faith and practice.

### **SANCTIFICATION**

We believe that sanctification is a progressive act of God's grace in us, conforming us to the image of His Son, starting with conversion and continued by faith, repentance and obedience.

### **LIFE STYLE**

We believe that the Christian should strive, enabled by the Holy Spirit, to live a godly, holy life in this present evil world. God accords to each the rights of private judgment and the liberty of conscience which should be stewarded and exercised by all.

## **THE CHURCH**

We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in Christ.

## **SACRAMENTS**

We believe there are two sacraments given to the church to make visible our unity until he returns: baptism and communion. Baptism is administered once in a person's life, either as a new believer or as a covenant child. Communion is for all believers who repent of their sins.

## **CHURCH GOVERNMENT**

We believe it is Biblical for a church to be governed by a plurality of spiritually qualified elders.

## **THE END**

We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life, and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

## **ARTICLE V - AMENDMENTS**

In order to amend this constitution, any member or group of the church may submit a proposed amendment and/or addition in writing, to the elders who shall speak to the motion at the next regular meeting. If approved by the elders the changes will be proposed to the congregation. The changes will be made official by a vote of the congregation (2/3 of voting members present will be required for passage).

## **ARTICLE VI - MEMBERSHIP**

### **Section A. Reception**

1. This church will welcome into its membership any person who publicly acknowledges Jesus Christ as Savior and purposes to live in accordance with His teachings upon:
  - a. Confessing their faith in Jesus Christ. Christian baptism is required for new believers. Or,
  - b. Reaffirming their faith in Jesus Christ. Or,
  - c. Presenting satisfactory letter or transfer from another church.
2. The candidate shall be questioned as to their faith in, or experience with the Lord, by the Pastor and the Elders. Qualifications for membership shall consist of

satisfactory evidence of regeneration and unqualified agreement with the Statement of Faith, and understanding of the Mission and Purpose statements of the church.

## **Section B. Rights, Duties, Privileges and Status**

### Rights

1. All members are encouraged to attend any and every worship service, prayer service, teaching fellowship, study group, and church congregational meeting.
2. All members have the right to hold office and to teach upon approval of appropriate leadership, to speak, and to work in the church and its organizations.

### Duties

All members are charged to support the work of the church, by prayer, regular attendance, holding office and by giving systematically for the support of the church.

### Privileges

Motions and Voting - All active members 18 years of age and older are eligible to introduce proper motions, and vote, at any congregational meeting. Active members 18 years of age and older are qualified to vote on any matter.

### Status

Members will be categorized as Active, Associate, or Inactive. The presumed status of any member is active. The Elders hold the authority to change the status of a member from active to that of associate or inactive. A change in status may be initiated by the elders or by a member.

**Active:** Members who regularly contribute to the life and mission of the church.

**Associate:** Members who for ministry or other position (college student) are not permanently living in this area, and who wish to retain primary membership in another local church not nearby.

**Inactive:** Members who are unable to regularly contribute to the life and mission of the church because of being providentially hindered by illness or other family matters which call them out of involvement, or out of the area for more than twelve (12) months. They are not eligible to vote unless reinstated by the Elders, since, by their lack of regular participation, are not personally involved with the life of the church.

Except in matters of voting, an inactive member shall retain all rights and privileges of membership.

To be an active member, one promises to be present and participating as much as possible in a positive manner. Not to be present or participating is to be an inactive member.

### **Section C. Termination of Membership**

1. Membership in this church may be terminated by any one of the following ways:
  - a. Death
  - b. Request
  - c. Erasure - members who are known to have joined another church will have their names dropped from the membership roll by the Elders. Members on inactive role for more than 1 year shall, after being given due notice, be removed from the roles by the Elders.
  - d. A refusal to abide by any part of our Constitution
  - e. Any failure to abide by Biblical guidelines for attitude and character, which required disciplinary procedures as outlined in scripture (e.g. Matt. 18), if after completion of said no satisfactory response was made.
  - f. Reinstatement to Membership. The intended goal of applying church discipline is always the restoration of the wayward. Those whose membership has been terminated and who desire to be reinstated shall reapply for membership and, upon acceptance by the Elders be reinstated.

## **ARTICLE VII - SERVICES**

There shall be regularly scheduled services of this church every calendar year.

### **Section A. Bible Study**

Bible instruction shall be held for all age groups each Sunday, under the direction of the Elders (for adults) and the Children's Ministry Coordinator (for children K4 - 12th grade).

### **Section B. Children's Church**

Children's Church shall be offered weekly, under the direction of the Elders and Children's Ministry Coordinator

### **Section C. Worship Service**

A service of worship shall be held each week, usually on Sunday.

## **Section D. The Lord's Supper**

The Lord's Supper shall be administered regularly by the elders.

## **Section E. Baptism**

Public baptismal or dedication may be held at the discretion of the Pastor.

## **Section F. Ordination**

Ordination of Elders and Deacons consists of a charge, and prayer during the "laying on of hands". Ordination is for life, subject to the conditions in Article X.

# **ARTICLE VIII - PASTOR**

## **Section A. Pastoral Responsibilities**

Refer to "The Role of the Pastor" paper for appropriate statements concerning his officiation at all ordinances and oversight of all worship services. This does not necessarily imply his direct participation, but only his responsibility.

## **Section B. Pastoral Selection**

A Pastor shall be chosen and called by the church whenever a vacancy occurs. His election shall take place at a meeting called for that purpose, attended by at least one half of the members on the active roster, of which at least one week's public notice has been given.

The Pastoral Selection Committee shall be composed of 3 Elders, 1 Deacon, and any others the elders wish to serve on such committee. They shall seek out a suitable pastor, and its recommendations will constitute a nomination. During the selection process input from the Consortium pastors will be solicited and considered. Any voting member of the congregation has the privilege of making other recommendations to the Pastoral Selection Committee. The committee shall bring to the consideration of the church only one name at a time. Election shall be by secret ballot; an affirmative vote of 3/4 of those active members present and voting being necessary for a choice. The pastor, thus elected, shall serve until the relationship is terminated by his or the church's request. The pastor shall give at least 30 days notice at the time of resignation before terminating his responsibilities as pastor unless other arrangements have been made with the church, or in the case of severe illness. A 90-day notice of termination or an equivalent severance pay shall be given by the church when it initiates the termination.

### **Section C. Pastoral Dismissal**

Should the effectiveness of the pastor be judged to be seriously impaired, criticism shall be referred to the Elders. The Elders shall take under advisement all facets of the issues and work toward resolution in brotherly love. When internal means for resolving issues have been exhausted, representatives from the Consortium churches shall be invited to help mediate the conflict. Dismissal of the pastor shall require a 3/4 majority vote of those active members present and voting at a meeting called for this purpose. Voting shall be by secret ballot. The Elders shall be responsible for executing the decisions of the congregation.

## **ARTICLE IX - MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS**

### **Section A. Location**

The principal place of worship, work and business of this church is 8909 Eclipse Drive, Suffolk, Virginia 23433. There shall be no change of this location except on 2/3 affirmative vote of the eligible voting members attending the congregational meeting called for that purpose, 30 days after the proper motion of intent.

### **Section B. Authority**

The congregation of James River Community Church holds full ownership and title to all funds, securities, bonds, deeds, and real property through any person necessarily designated, and under the conditions of Article XI, Funds and Property, of this constitution.

### **Section C. Motions and Voting**

All members 18 years of age and older are eligible to vote on the following matters:

- a) pastoral call
- b) acquisition and sale of real property
- c) amendments to the constitution
- d) election of officers.

All questions, not otherwise mentioned in this constitution as requiring a specified majority, or waiting period, shall pass by a simple majority of the eligible members present. Provision may be made for absentee written balloting if requested.

### **Section D. Meetings**

Membership business meetings shall be held at least twice a year. This Constitution shall be reviewed annually by the membership at quarterly meetings with special emphasis on ARTICLES III, IV, VI, and VII. One of these meetings shall be held between November 15 and December 15 for the purpose of recognizing newly appointed officers. An annual



report will be made to the congregation during the month of January each year. Newly confirmed elders and deacons shall be publicly installed. All regular meetings shall be announced publicly for two consecutive Sundays immediately prior to the meeting and by mail or email to all active members. Upon majority vote of the Board of Elders, urgent special meetings may be called with at least two weeks written notice by mail to all active members stating the date and purpose of the special meeting.

## ARTICLE X – ELDERS AND DEACONS

### ELDERS

**Section A. *Composition.*** Elders will serve in specific areas of pastoral ministry or at-large. The number of elders and their area of ministry shall be defined by the Board of Elders to best suit the needs of the church. A minimum of four elders, including the senior pastor, shall be sustained at all times. Areas of ministry shall be matched to spiritual giftedness and ministry experience.

**Section B. *Duties.*** It will be the duty of the Board of Elders to care for the spiritual condition of the church as set forth in 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:9; 1 Peter 5:1-3; and Acts 20:28.

**Section C. *Qualifications.*** All elders shall be members of the James River Community Church. An elder must be one in whom the spiritual gifts of leadership have been recognized by fellow believers. In view of the tremendous responsibility incumbent upon a leader of this assembly as an example to the flock (1 Peter 5:2), (i.e., a spiritual "pacesetter,") he shall conform to the New Testament prerequisites as follows: The fruit of the Spirit as stated in Galatians 5:22-23 shall be evident in his life--love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, fidelity, tolerance and self-control. The character and lifestyle of an elder shall be as described in Acts 6:3, I Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:6-9: He shall not be a new convert, but tried and proven faithful. He shall be devout, full of the Spirit and of wisdom; he should be able to teach, holding fast the faithful Word and able to exhort in sound doctrine and refute error. He must be the husband of one wife, solely devoted to that one woman and capable of modeling a lifestyle of devotion. The phrase "husband of one wife" shall not mean that a divorced man is excluded from qualification as an elder. Since there are scriptural grounds for divorce, men who have been divorced, or married to someone who has, will be considered for office on a case by case basis. He shall be able to manage his own household well, having children who believe and who are submissive and respectful. He should be a man of dignity and integrity, above reproach and respectable, having a good reputation outside the church. He should be just and a lover of good. In addition, he should be sensible, prudent and temperate, self-controlled but not self-willed. With regard to temperament and conduct, he should be hospitable and gentle, not contentious, quick-tempered or violent. He should be free from the love of money and not addicted to wine.

In fulfilling their office, elders must recognize the priority of love in motive and method as described in I Corinthians 13:1-8. They shall be such men as have proven by their conduct that their goals and aspirations are spiritual and not carnal. Consequently, those who accept the above mentioned responsibilities must carefully guard themselves against entanglement with the world. Blatant, worldly forms of entertainment will be avoided and discretion will be used concerning theater, television, reading material or other media.

In their role as an example, they must exercise self-control in all areas of their lives avoiding the use of strong drink, habit-forming drugs, or any such addicting practices. The attitudes of weaker or new believers are often largely patterned after the acts of those they follow and hold in high esteem. Therefore, elders must be sensitive to avoid what might commonly cause others to stumble. They must seek to live a life above reproach before men and before the Lord.

**Section D. Selection.** All elders, other than the Senior Pastor, shall be selected as follows:

1. The Board of Elders shall, as needed, select a committee drawn from the membership who will recommend candidates to the Board for eldership training.
2. Those candidates who have demonstrated the biblical qualifications for elder or in whom such potential is recognized shall be requested by the Board of Elders to participate in an eldership training program.
3. Upon successful completion of the program, candidates will be presented to the membership for confirmation by majority vote.

**Section E. Terms.** Elders are ordained to such office for life. They may become inactive for appropriate reasons (illness, family urgency), or rotate off the board according to whatever policy the elders may set for limiting the time of a term of service.

**Section F. Termination.** Elders may resign from church office at any point. No one may resign his office without first submitting written reasons to the elders for approval by them. Should the circumstance occur that the entire board wish to resign, assistance from the leadership of other churches in our consortium or of other churches nearby with like doctrine and practice, will be sought to mediate such difficulty. Elders may be dismissed by two-thirds majority vote of the Board.

## **DEACONS**

The Deacons shall be appointed by the Elders. Qualifications for Deacons are given in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. It will be the duty of the Deacons to care for the physical needs of the church and community as illustrated by Acts 6:1-7.

**Section A. Acquisition.** Income shall be derived only from collections, gifts, rental of the church building, or other organized fund raising endeavors by any group approved by the elders. Gifts may be of any form and may be designated. The elders reserve the right to return any gift of money or property deemed not in keeping with the mission of JRCC to the donor. Expenditure of designated gifts require no vote of the church. All gifts, funds, negotiable securities, bonds, bequests in any form, or real property, whether donated, purchased, charged, or financed, must be in the name of James River Community Church and be received through the church treasurer for accounting purposes.

**Section B. Disposition.** The effective use of financial resources is a vital part in fulfilling the role of the church and its ministries, including daughter churches and specialized ministries. This church unreservedly and irrevocably commits itself to a kind of Christian stewardship and faith in God that realistically budgets all income and expenditures on a year-to-year basis.

**Section C. Reports.** The Board of Elders will make regular reports to the church body concerning the Local Ministries and Missions financial accounts. The membership will be given reports at each by-annual meeting. The Board of Elders shall monitor all financial activities of the church. Financial reviews will be conducted and reported in the Annual Report.

**Section D. Fiscal Year.** The fiscal year of the church shall be the calendar year.

**Section E. Dissolution.** In the event of the church's dissolution and after all debts have been satisfied, the remaining assets of the church shall be distributed evenly between our sister Consortium churches: Chesapeake Community Chapel, Peninsula Community Chapel, Tabernacle Church of Norfolk, Virginia Beach Community Chapel, and the Williamsburg Community Chapel.

**Section F. Audit.** When called upon, an audit shall be performed by the Elders or their designate of all things belonging to the church, and the report distributed to the church during a membership meeting.

## ARTICLE XII – MINISTRIES

**Section A. Purpose.** In providing a complete ministry to the whole individual and family and community, the church recognizes the need to establish and direct to maturity certain non-profit extended ministries as a vital part of the church's function of worship, education, evangelism and missions.

**Section B. *Establishment and Government.*** The Board of Elders shall be empowered to establish extended ministries and shall oversee each ministry. The Board of Elders shall adopt a constitution and/or by-laws for each ministry, setting forth the purposes and guidelines of the ministry and the powers of the Executive Board and administrators. The Elder Board shall appoint a board to direct the affairs of each extended ministry which in turn shall be directly responsible to the Elder Board. The Senior Pastor shall maintain a close coordinative relationship with the chief administrative officer and board chairman of each extended ministry. When a ministry is incorporated and has exempt status with the federal government, by-laws shall be adopted which grant self-government to the ministry with the ministry's board being ratified by the Board of Elders and certain other stipulations agreed on, or the ministry may be granted total independence by approval of the membership.

### ARTICLE XIII – CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Discipline is necessary for the spiritual health and unity of the church and its people. Its purpose is to deal scripturally with sin and disunity, to restore fellowship and to keep Satan from getting advantage over the church. It shall be carried out by the leaders in accordance with Scripture.

**Section 1. *Pastoral Discipline.*** Reproof and admonition will be given privately by persons in a pastoral role to those in the church who are living in sin to restore them spiritually. (Galatians 6:1, Matthew 18:15). If the matter is not resolved, it may be brought to the Board of Elders and dealt with in accordance with Matthew 18:15-17. When the issue warrants it, a person may be removed from a place of responsibility and trust.

**Section B. *Removal from Membership.*** This action can be taken only by the Board of Elders. Members who are a) living in gross sin such as defined in I Corinthians 5:1-13, or b) who become out of harmony with the doctrines or purposes of the church as defined in this Constitution and which are a prerequisite for membership in ARTICLE V, or c) who by their attitudes and actions are promoting a spirit of disharmony in the church (Romans 16:17-18) shall be approached according to the pattern of Matthew 18:15-17 in a spirit of brotherly love to effect repentance and reconciliation. If the member is not restored to fellowship following patient counseling and prayer, he shall not be allowed to partake of the Lord's Table, his name shall be removed from the Membership Roll and instructions shall be given to the church not to have Christian fellowship with him. The church will continue to encourage him to repent, confess and forsake his sin (Matthew 18:17; I Corinthians 5:1-13; II Thessalonians 3:6, 14, 15). Those in the fellowship who are not members of the church (see ARTICLE III) will be disciplined in a similar way except in the matter of the Membership Roll which does not apply to them.

**Section C. *Reinstatement.*** Reinstatement to the membership, the Lord's Table and fellowship will be done by the Board of Elders when the problems that caused the disciplinary action are resolved satisfactorily (II Corinthians 2:1-11; 7:8-12).