

Article VI & VII: Membership & Church Discipline (from Bread of Life Fellowship's Constitution)

Step 2: If reasonable effort in private reproof fails to convince the sinning person of their need to repent, the matter can be brought to one or more additional witnesses who should offer additional admonition to repent. It is suggested at this time that a minister in the church (but necessarily an elder – unless the accusation is against an elder) be a part of this confrontation so that the sinning person may realize the weight of their action or teaching. If the offender admits to the sin and stops, no further action is warranted.

Step 3: If the offender refuses to repent after reasonable attempts at the admonition of two or three witnesses, the matter should be submitted to an elder. The elder with the counsel of the entire Board of Elders may set a time period whereby the offender may change his mind about his sinful action or teaching. If that time period is exhausted without repentance, the matter should be presented before the congregation.

Step 4: If the matter is not resolved to the satisfaction of the church, the Board of Elders should then decide to exclude the sinning person from attendance and participation in any fellowship, meeting, and/or service and if a member, be removed from membership in unfavorable standing. The decision to dis-fellowship which is made by a unanimous-majority* of the Board of Elders, shall be announced to the members of the local body. The entire assembly will be encouraged publicly to not have fellowship with the unrepentant party; however, members should pray for and encourage the offender to repent and reconcile.

(* a unanimous-majority instead of unanimity is suggested in this case so that elders unfamiliar with the case may not vote or abstain without pressure to act on something they may have little or no knowledge about. All of the elders voting to dis-fellowship an individual must be in agreement to do so.)

Any member has the right to appeal this decision to the Board of Elders at any time during or after the disciplinary process, by submitting a request for an appeal to an Elder in writing.

Step 5: This is the ultimate goal of all discipline – namely that the disciplined person demonstrate repentance and be restored. Any person disciplined in any capacity who demonstrates repentance, may be restored to fellowship by a simple majority vote (at least 51%) of the Board of Elders. At the discretion of the Board, limitations may be set in the process of restoration with the goal of complete reconciliation and full participation.

Any person exhibiting signs of contrition, but for one reason or another has difficulty attaining full restoration, shall be considered for other forms of disciplinary action such as restriction from serving in ministry, participating in a fellowship or assembly, or repudiation from participating at the Lord's Table (which would be for the benefit of the individual based on I Corinthians 11:23-34.) Such a decision should be decided by a majority of the Board of Elders, and communicated by an elder to the individual.

Since it is the tendency of man to rate sins as "severe" or "minor," we need to be aware that God counts all sin as sin. Discipline is a gift He gives to the local body for the purpose of purifying it from all sin. In considering such, it should not be considered extreme to exercise the aforementioned steps of discipline for sins like gossip, slander, or covetousness, as we would in cases of fornication or adultery.

Article VI: Membership

Members are those who support the congregation by prayer, regular fellowship, financial giving, and faithful service when called up. There is no formal membership paperwork or public reception unless the Board of Elders deems this to be necessary in the future.

A. Qualifications for Membership

Membership at Bread of Life Fellowship is based upon membership in the body of Christ. Any baptized born-again believer who is following Christ as Lord and Savior, regularly attending Lord's Day services, a home church and/or other weekly meeting for a period of at least one year, and familiar with the assembly's Statement of Faith, and faithfully endeavoring by the grace of God to make his life conform to the Word of God, shall be considered a member of this assembly. New-Comers and those considering making this assembly their home fellowship shall be encouraged to examine the Statement of Faith and Constitution and discuss with an elder or designated deacon, any matter requiring clarification. An individual who does not want to be considered a "member" but is willing to adhere to the standards and direction of the elders, may do so by letting the elders know in writing.

A baptized believer who is attending Bread of Life Fellowship regularly for a period of 6 months may be considered for formal membership after interview by the eldership, if the church in which they were formally a member recommends them for a transfer of membership. Admittance of any member (6 months or otherwise) requires the unanimous agreement of the elders and general agreement of the church body.

Baptized believing Christians who marry current members of Bread of Life Fellowship may, upon request, be considered for membership and admitted, upon the unanimous agreement of the elders and general agreement of the church body.

Objections raised by existing church members over the receiving of a new member (whether by marriage or in the case of transfer) ought to be seriously considered by the elders. Efforts should be made to discover the nature of the objection and if substantive, should put membership on hold at least until the full year of attendance is fulfilled.

(Amendment added by unanimous vote of church 1/15/15) A baptized believer who is attending Bread of Life Fellowship regularly for a period of 6 months may be considered for formal membership after interview by the eldership, if the church in which they were formally a member recommends them for a transfer of membership. Admittance of any member (6 months or otherwise) requires the unanimous agreement of the elders and general agreement of the church body.

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A. Membership Notification

Those who have been a regular part of Bread of Life Fellowship for at least one year and fulfill the qualifications of membership described in Article VI paragraph A, will be considered members by the elders. The elders may wait longer before approving someone for membership upon their discretion. Membership in Bread of Life Fellowship is presumed based upon every believer's universal membership in the body of Christ and command to participate in a local fellowship of believers. A letter stating the status of a new member should be sent to each individual or family, telling them that it is presumed that they

understand and are familiar with the assembly's Statement of Faith and constitution. There are to be no additional expectations placed upon members – except as stated above in paragraph A. In their letter of membership, it should be expressed that the individual or family may, if they wish to not be considered a member, but still attend and be a part of the fellowship, sign a waiver of membership stating that they will adhere to the rules of the congregation and leadership of the elders as outlined in the constitution, but that do not wish to be considered a member. They may wish to explain why, but nothing further is required. A statement may be prepared by the elders in which they can sign and return, or they may write a letter in their own words stating these things. Letter from adherents will be accepted by the eldership, as long as they clearly state a willingness to abide by the guidelines and tenets of the church.

C. Inadequacy for Membership Consideration

At the discretion of the Board of Elders, a person may be placed on hold from being considered a member even though fulfilling the aforementioned requirements for membership. Such circumstances include but are not limited to immoral lifestyle, discipline, problems or divisiveness at another assembly, false doctrine, and/or an unwillingness to submit to the elders or Statement of Faith.

D. Withdrawal of Membership

Membership may be withdrawn at any time by simply notifying the elders. Members who have not notified the elders but have not participated in the ministry in any manner for three months (without notification) will be removed from official membership but will remain in good standing unless the loss of such is indicated as described in the next section.

E. Loss of Good Standing

Membership may be removed by a decision of the Board of Elders – good standing is lost when:

1. A known and unrepentant sin continues to be practiced with no sign of contrition (see Article VII for detail).
2. A member is teaching doctrines contrary to the Scripture. While a member may appeal and present his view to the Board of Elders, the ultimate authority in deciding whether a teaching is error and whether the member teaching this is to be disciplined shall remain with the Board of Elders.
3. The member has exhibited divisive behavior in this or another assembly.
4. Any member who disregards the Word of God or goes contrary thereto, after loving admonition by the elders and deliberately continues in a contrary lifestyle.

F. Submitting to the Elders

Each member or adherent shall accept the privilege of local body participation by submitting to and accepting the decisions of the Board of Elders including the elders' decision to exercise discipline (see Article VII for detail). Members shall accept the responsibility of exercising their gifts of the Spirit under the guidance of the elders for the edification of the entire body. Members will be called upon to utilize their gifts in service of the ministry.

G. Returning Members

Any member who has left the fellowship or withdraw membership while in good standing, may if he so desires, return to membership upon returning to regular fellowship for six months, and fulfilling the requirements stated in paragraph A of Article VI.

H. Removal of Membership (Amendment added unanimous church vote 1/27/08)

In Hebrews 13:17 the writer gives the church the admonition to obey and submit to their elders. Attached to the command is the profound statement, *"for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account."* If an elder is to take this seriously, it is important that he know for whose soul is he responsible for in his oversight. While the elders authority extends to the entire church (members and non-members alike), their primary responsibility lies with those who are counted as members. The elders' oversight and shepherding (1 Pet 5:2) of members becomes very difficult when a member is inconsistent in their attendance at church services, meetings and fellowships. For this reason individuals who have not demonstrated regularity in their attendance and participation will not be considered for membership (in addition to those stated reasons in Article VI section C). Also, an existing church member's removal is consistent with general biblical principles, and sometimes necessitated by the above considerations. Therefore, members who are otherwise in good standing and whose conduct does not warrant corrective discipline (as described in Article VII) may be removed from the membership roll under the following conditions (in addition to those already stated reasons in Article VI section E):

- (a) When such a one concludes he has not been truly converted.
- (b) When such a one, upon relocation, ceases to maintain vital contact with the church.
- (c) When such a one wishes to transfer membership to another Biblical church.
- (d) When such a one wishes to terminate his membership for other reasons which do not call into question his Christian profession.
- (e) When such a one either due to carelessness or other circumstances, fails as a pattern of life, to maintain regular fellowship with the church body, without showing just cause.

When the elders conclude that removal is warranted, after first informing the member himself of this assessment, they shall inform the other members of this judgment, and the reasons for such action, at a congregational meeting. A period of one month will be allowed for objections or questions to be raised privately with the elders concerning the member's removal. If no objections are raised, the member shall be removed. In the event that any objections are raised, or the member himself does not wish to be removed from membership, the elders shall postpone the removal of a member until the objections are investigated and resolved to their satisfaction. In all cases, persons finally removed from membership shall be informed of the church's action. Of course they may continue to fellowship within the church as long as they agree to adhere to the church's standards, but they forfeit privileges which are reserved for members.

Article VII: Church Discipline

As a manner to maintain peace and unity while encouraging repentance and purity in the church, Scripture teaches and gives the authority to the church to exercise discipline of a sinning person in its ranks. Members, adherents, or anyone person attending or participating in any fellowship, assembly, or ministry may be restricted from active participation and membership in the body in any form as determined by the Board of Elders. Steps to disciplinary action shall be followed as described in Matthew chapter 18, whenever there is uncorrected, deliberate sin, including omissions of duty, whether in doctrine or practice.

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." (Matthew 18:15-18)

Step 1: Effort should first be made by any individual with first-hand awareness of the sin or aberrant teaching, to attempt to gently correct the person. If the person with first-hand knowledge of the sin is not sure how to proceed, they may seek counsel of an elder or deacon, without mentioning the person in question's name. The first meeting should be private between the offender and the person confronting.

In cases where severe transgression could danger the physical or spiritual life of another person (such as severe false teaching to a new or weaker believer, physical abuse, suicide, etc.) matters should be brought directly to the attention of an elder, who at his discretion can bring it before the Board of Elders for immediate action.