

Soma Community Church Constitution

*Growth occurs with the sharing of the Gospel not the planning of the church.
- 1. Cor 3:5-11*

ARTICLE I

The name of this church shall be SOMA COMMUNITY CHURCH.

ARTICLE II

- I. Vision Statement: The Church is People.
- II. Mission: To be Jesus to our community and become like Him in our lives.
- III. Wins
 - A. Overall: For an individual to take a step, act, or make a commitment to be Jesus to their community (and/or) become like Him in their lives. (Be and Become)
 - B. Large Gathering: For an individual to be moved toward God in heart, soul, mind, and strength. (Toward God, For God)
 - C. House Church (relationally): For an individual to risk comfort, security, and reputation by sharing, giving, or supporting emotionally and physically the needs of another believer or unbeliever. (Following Christ means sharing your life)
 - D. Communion: When we make much of God by the sharing of recent intimacy with Him in a specific relationship. (To make intimacy, reality)
 - E. House Church (Missionally): Contact with one's community that pulls the other individual into the reality of God for a period of time. (Here's the deal, God is real)

ARTICLE III

The covenant by which this church exists as a distinct body, and which every member accepts, is as follows:

Acknowledging Jesus Christ to be our Savior and Lord, the head of the church, and submitting to the authority of the Holy Scriptures as our rule of faith and practice, and recognizing the privilege and duty of uniting ourselves for Christian fellowship, the enjoyment of Christian ordinances, the public worship of God, and the advancement of His church on earth, we do now, in the sight of God and invoking His blessing, solemnly covenant and agree with each other to associate ourselves as a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, as warranted by the Word of God.

We agree to maintain the teaching and the preaching of the Word of God, to submit ourselves to the orderly administration of the affairs of the church and to walk together in brotherly love.

This we do depending on the aid of our Heavenly Father, who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son for our Salvation; and of Jesus Christ who has redeemed us with His blood, and of the Holy Spirit, our Comforter and Guide.

ARTICLE IV

I. Statement of Faith

- A. **THE BIBLE:** the Word of God, the sixty-six Books of the Old and New Testaments, verbally inspired in all parts, and therefore wholly without error as originally given of God (II Tim. 3:16; II Peter 1:21).
- B. **THE ONE TRUE GOD:** existing eternally as three persons -- the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22; Matt. 28:19; II Cor. 13:14).
- C. **THE LORD JESUS CHRIST:** His preexistence and deity (John 1:1-3), incarnation by virgin birth (John 1:14; Matt. 1:18-23), sinless life (Heb. 4:15), substitutionary death (II Cor. 5:21), bodily resurrection (Luke 24:36-43), ascension into heaven and present ministry (Heb. 4:14-16), and coming again (Acts 1:11).
- D. **THE HOLY SPIRIT:** His personality (John 16:7-15); and deity (Acts 5:3-4); and His work in each believer: baptism and indwelling at the moment of regeneration (I Cor. 12:13; Rom. 8:9); and filling (Eph. 5:18) to empower for Christian life and service (Eph 3:16; Acts 1:8; Gal. 5:22-23).
- E. **MAN:** his direct creation in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28), his subsequent fall into sin resulting in spiritual death (Gen. 3:1-24; Rom. 5:12), and the necessity of the new birth for his salvation (John 3:3-5).
- F. **SALVATION:** a complete and eternal salvation by God's grace alone, received as the gift of God through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-7; I Peter 1:18-19).
- G. **THE CHURCH:** one true Church, the body and bride of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:25-32), composed of all true believers of the present age (I

Cor. 12:12-13); and the organization of its members in local churches for worship, for edification of believers, and for world-wide gospel witness, each local church being autonomous but cooperating in fellowship and work (Eph. 4:11-16).

- H. **CHRISTIAN LIFE:** a life of righteousness, good works, and separation unto God from the evil ways of the world (Rom. 12:1-2), manifested by speaking the truth (James 5:12), maintaining the sanctity of the home (Eph. 5:22 - 6:4), settling differences between Christians in accordance with the Word of God (1 Cor 6:1-8), not engaging in carnal strife but showing a Christ-like attitude toward all men (Rom. 12:17-21), exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), and maintaining a life of prayer (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6), including the privilege, when sick, of calling for the elders of the church to pray and to anoint with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5:13-18).
- I. **ORDINANCES:** the Christian should observe the ordinances of our Lord Jesus Christ, which are (1) baptism of believers by triune immersion (Matt. 28:19) and (2) the threefold communion service, consisting of the washing of the saints' feet (John 13:1-17), the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20-22, 33-34; Jude 12), and the communion of the bread and the cup (1 Cor. 11:23-26).
- J. **SATAN:** his existence and personality as the great adversary of God and His people (Rev. 12:1-10), his judgment (John 12:31), and final doom (Rev 19:11-20:6).
- K. **SECOND COMING:** the personal, visible, and imminent return of Christ to remove His Church from the earth (1 Thess. 4:16-17)
- L. **FUTURE LIFE:** the conscious existence of the dead (Phil. 1:21-23; Luke 16:19-31), the resurrection of the body (John 5:28-29), the judgment and reward of believers (Rom. 14:10-12; II Cor. 5:10), the judgment and condemnation of unbelievers (Rev. 20:11-15), the eternal life of the saved (John 3:16), and the eternal punishment of the lost (Matt. 25:46; Rev. 20:15).
- M. **THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVERS:** the privilege granted to followers of Christ equally to baptize converts (Matt 28:19), approach God freely (Heb 4:16), partake of communion (John 6:51-57; Acts 2:42), offer their body as living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1-2), diligently interpret scripture (1 Cor 2:12-14; 2 Tim 2:15), declare the praises of God (1 Peter 2:9), as citizens of heaven (Hebrews 12:18-24), adopted sons (Romans 8:15), born of God (John 1:13), following one High Priest (Hebrews 7:23-8:13),

ARTICLE V

I. Authority

- A. The primary authority by which this church exists as an ecclesiastical body is Jesus Christ as the Head of His body as revealed by the Holy Scriptures. It recognizes and sustains the mutual counsel and cooperation which is common among Grace Brethren Churches.
- B. The secondary authority is by the laws of the State of Ohio, under which it is incorporated.

II. Property

- A. The title of the property of this church shall be vested in the corporate body of the church.
- B. All property or assets owned by the local church and its auxiliaries shall be irrevocably dedicated to Christ's purposes and upon dissolution such property or assets shall not inure to the benefit of any private citizen but shall be distributed to a religious organization which is a qualified tax exempt organization and which shall be selected by the members of this local church or in the event of their failure to make such selection, by the Judge of Court or general jurisdiction in the county where this church shall be located.
- C. At no time the cost incurred to maintain and operate property and space shall exceed that of 25% the total budget with the exception of the first fiscal year of some community church.

III. Financial Statements

- A. Twice each fiscal year a budget shall be made available for all interested parties. At any time during the year, individual members may request a copy of the current finance budget by written request.

ARTICLE VI

I. Membership

A. Philosophy for Membership

1. The Church is a body. In order to function as a body, one must know its parts. Membership is not a country club or multi level marketing; rather it is a covenant to one another as mature Christ-like members of a body.
2. Members are different from attendees in that members have made a decided commitment to call Soma their church family and sacrifice their time, talents, and treasure for one another and the benefit of their communities coming to know Christ.

3. Members recognize the call for believers to become active in their role within the body and recognize that that which consumes resources long term without commitment harms the body.

B. Privileges of Membership

1. Membership to Soma Community Church shall be seen as an act of service to a group of people and in no way signifies a right of passage or high of status. Rather, membership is intended to represent in a physical way the commitment of mutual submission to one another as worship to Christ as outlined in (Ephesians 5:1-21, Philip 2)
2. Only members will be granted privilege to serve in positions of leadership or service to the body, with the exception of musical guests.

C. Definition: Membership @ Soma community church will be defined by those individuals of which the following is true:

1. Willingly, and personally understand themselves to be part of the soma community and actively pursue the benefit of the people within the Soma community and those with whom the community seeks to reach.
2. Actively participate in a House Church
3. Exhibit proper New Testament generosity
4. Has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ
5. Willingly submit themselves to leadership of the body and the Bible.
6. Has attended at least one orientation presentation.
7. Accept the conditions, doctrine, and terms here in.

D. Continuance of Membership

1. Annually at a fore appointed time the body of individuals composing Soma community church will be asked to reaffirm their covenant with one another and the contents here in for exactly 12 months.
2. Those individuals composing Soma Community Church will be given no less than four weeks notice prior to the renewal period.
3. Any member that holds a grievance leading to a possible discontinuance in membership is invited to express his or her concern in writing to the elders for review during the four weeks prior to renewal.
4. At said time ALL names will be dropped from the former roster and those names which have been submitted will be applied.
5. No member will be asked to disclose his or her projected giving.

E. Withdrawal of Membership

1. Any member wishing to discontinue membership with said body, during the re-affirmation period is invited to not renew his or her covenant.
2. No member in good standing shall be required by the authority of the organization or the elders as to give reason for non continuance. (excluding self disclosure)
3. If a member is unable to fulfill the 12 month commitment and wishes to be withdrawn prior to the designated re-affirmation period, he or she may submit their intentions in writing to the assimilation staff and an inactive status will be applied to their membership until the annual renewal.

F. Removal of Membership

1. Should a member fail to perform his duties outlined above, and due efforts by the Elders or designates of the church have failed to encourage his interest and after this condition has prevailed for one year, his name may be dropped from the membership..
2. A member may be removed by notice in writing if the terms outlined in the restoration process have been met. (see Article XI)

ARTICLE VII

I. Elders/Shepherds

A. Appointment

1. Soma Community believes that the office of an elder may be held by a male only.
2. A man desiring to hold the office of an elder must first submit his intention in writing to the church elders.
3. After submission of intent the individual shall be subject to an evaluation period in which all areas of his life shall be examined not limited to but including: spiritual discipline and growth, Christian conduct, marital/family relationships (where applicable), knowledge of the word and application in daily life, giving, ability to teach, Christology, Ecclesiology, standard background check, and personal habits. If applicable his wife and children will be interviewed. This process is not to create a perfect unattainable standard, but rather to insure that true Biblical leadership and examples of Godly men will be preserved.
4. If the individual passes the inspection of the other elders he will then be required to fulfill a set reading regiment and training process lasting three months.

5. After the above qualifications have been met the elder will be confirmed by the current elders of the church by a unanimous vote.
6. Once approved, the elder and his family will be presented to the congregation for commissioning. Two weeks prior to this service it will be announced that anyone who has any reason as to why this man should not be considered for appointment, he or she has two weeks to inform the current elders.
7. In the event that a congregant emerges with a Biblical concern for the individual's appointment, the commission will be placed on delay until the matter is resolved. A matter will be considered resolved by a two-thirds vote by the current elders.

G. Compensation

1. Elders may be employed by the church or may be laymen depending on roles and necessity.
2. Employment will be considered by needs of the body and giftings of the individual. An offer of employment will be extended to an Elder by a two-thirds vote of the current church Elders (excluding his own).
3. Elders may at times hire those staff required to aid in the exercise of their duties. Said staff hiring will be brought by the elder wishing to hire to the other elders for discussion. If budgetary, vision, and needs comply the elder will be granted the ability to hire and remove those staff to undertake the job. Priority will be granted to those positions already listed in the org chart.

H. Dismissal

1. Grounds for dismissal of an Elder will be considered only on the testimony of two or more witnesses who must submit their petition in writing.
2. Reasons for dismissal will be examined in light of the Biblical requirements found in the Pastoral Epistles.
3. If it becomes evident that a dismissal be necessary an Elder will be released by a two-thirds vote.
4. During this process the Elders will inform the congregation as needed using Biblical discretion and personal sensitivity.
5. Upon Dismissal and depending on personal response the said individual will be placed into the Spiritual Restoration track.

I. Role of the Elder/Shepherd

1. The role of an Elder shall be that of assisting the Staff Elder in Shepherding and Ministering to the church body, teaching Biblical truth, upholding correct doctrine, vision, and leadership.

2. The role of Elders is not a committee or advisory board. Each Elder will have responsibility of Spiritual leadership and ministry.
3. The Elder will be assigned a particular House Church Region in which to minister to the body. The Elder will be responsible for coaching House Church leaders in areas listed but not limited to the following: personal growth, conflict resolution, sound teaching, community impact, and reproduction.
4. Should a problem arise to which the Elder deems greater accountability and prayer be need, He will ask for the help his fellow Elders.
5. Each Elder is required to report in writing on his HC region quarterly to the body of fellow elders.

J. Vacancy of Lead Elder

1. In an event there arises a vacancy of the Staff Elder position, either due to resignation, reassignment, or removal; responsibility for staff oversight will fall to the group of present elders.
2. Priority for replacement will be given to present leadership within Soma Community.
3. In the event that no leadership present is suitable to fulfill the position either due to qualifications or divine leading, the present elders will be charged with the responsibility initiating a search for a replacement.
4. An elder will be elected by two-thirds majority to head a search team. The search team will be comprised of two present elders, one representative elected from the staff by 2/3 vote by the staff, one representative of the body nominated by the body and confirmed by the body by 2/3. Qualifications of these representatives should embody those of a deacon as outlined in scripture.
5. Once possible candidates have been obtained by the search team, profiles and information should be presented to the present elders for consideration and prayer.
6. Confirmation of a new Lead Elder will be done by a unanimous vote of one vote per existing elder, one vote by the staff representative, and one vote by the body representative.
7. Once a unanimous vote has been obtained an offer of hire will be extended to the potential candidate. He or she will have 30 days to respond.
8. In the event that the offer is declined, the process shall repeat until the position has been filled.

ARTICLE VIII

I. Multiplication

A. Philosophy

1. While Soma Community Church welcomes the addition of any individual to its gatherings, it believes addition should be no substitute for multiplication in growth toward Christ-likeness.

B. Practice

1. The following model will be employed by Soma Community Church for individual multiplication:
 - a. You watch, I do, We talk.
 - b. I do, You help, We talk.
 - c. You do, I help, We talk.
 - d. You do, I watch, We talk.
2. Each Staff member, Elder, and House church leader will have an individual in whom He or she is investing his or her life in a way that exemplifies the above practice.

ARTICLE IX

I. House Church

“Following Christ means sharing your life”

A. Purpose

1. House Churches exist in our community as an intimate gathering of believers in a locale for the purpose of the encouragement of one another, discipleship, and the benefit of their community. They are to be Jesus to one another and their community, and become like Him in their lives.
2. House Churches are not the area of central teaching for this ministry. Rather they serve as an outlet for the body to function as the body, practicing “one anothers”, and loving those not yet in personal relationship with God. (Ephesians 4)

3. Priority will be given to personal interaction, fellowship, sharing of the gifts of God, sharing of devotional scripture, and corporate prayer.

B. Location

1. House Church physical locations will be managed by the Assimilation Coordinator.
2. Each house church will be identified most commonly by their street name then by region. (I.e. "I go to the Ridge Rd house church in the Central region)
3. Each location will be local to the community in which the house church attendees live and operate and may be held at a house that serves the "space" needs of that community with the exception of the House Church Leader's residence.
4. No House Church Leader shall have house church in his or her home on a permanent basis.

C. Leadership

1. House Church's will be consistently led by an individual and/or couple who meet the scriptural requirements of a deacon or deaconess.
2. House church leaders will be bound by obligation to serve the body for no less than one year at which time each leader is annually encouraged to reevaluate his or her commitment to serve the local body.
3. Female House Church leaders may lead a devotional time when done in agreement with a co leading husband or co leading male.
4. Each house church leader will identify for themselves a potential leader for future leadership development.
5. Leaders are able to lead Biblical discussions, share testimony, counsel, and baptize.
6. Leaders will be provided with the appropriate study helps and training.
7. Leaders will be asked to protect the privacy of those individuals which choose to disclose personal and spiritual information regarding themselves. Under no circumstance should a Leader repeat private information to other parties without that individual's verbal consent.

D. Application

1. Individuals desiring to be a house church leader must submit written 2 or three paragraphs describing his or her personal salvation experience and spiritual walk thus far.
2. Each individual will be interviewed by the shepherding elder from his or her region

3. Once the above tasks have been completed, he or she will be placed in a house church to act as the leader in training. If he or she is already associated with a HC then deference will be given said HC.
4. Leaders will be obligated to report any disclosure that involves improper abuse of a minor or plans that include immediate danger to harm oneself or another individual.

E. Continuance / Resignation

1. If after personal evaluation the leader decides to conclude his or her tenure of leadership, he or she will submit his or her intentions in writing to the shepherding Elder of their district and Staff Assimilator. At such time the request will be acknowledged by a response in writing by the shepherding Elder with encouragement and blessing for the future of the individual(s) within the body of Soma. Upon request the individual leader recognizes that he or she will be asked to respectively fulfill his or her duties for one month after giving notice of conclusion.
2. Replacement of Leadership will fall to the shepherding elder of the region and the Assimilation Coordinator

F. Community Involvement

1. Each quarter each House Church (HC) will be asked to identify one area in which they can be Jesus to their immediate community.
2. Each leader will submit via the website a request for funds from the general body and a description of the planned involvement.
3. Any remaining funds held by the HC after the planned community involvement will be returned to the general body for other use.
4. Each quarter a HC's community involvement will be featured as a highlight on the website. This will be the task of the administrative staff position.

G. Reproduction

1. House Churches will reproduce from within themselves when the leadership in training is ready to birth and shall not be dependent on any number of persons.
2. House Church "Birthings" will be seen as a special event to be celebrated. Individuals will be asked to share significant memories of fellowship and times of encouragement.
3. Prior to birthing the House Church will prayerfully consider those members to commission as sending missionaries to another community. Individuals will be asked to see if they are being led to plant with the birthing House Church.

ARTICLE X

I. Communion

“To make Intimacy a Reality”

A. Participants

1. Any individual may attend a communion service
2. Only those individuals who claim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will be invited to participate. All others present are welcome to remain as respected observers.
3. All believers present, regardless of “membership” or visitation, are invited to participate with the option of observing any or all parts.

B. Practice of

1. Communion will be held quarterly as a unique gathering of the body in a predetermined location.
2. Communion will be a corporate gathering and major on fellowship of believers as the body and bride of Jesus Christ collectively.
3. Prior to the service three individual believers will be asked to introduce each section with assigned scripture reading and prayer.
4. Communion will consist of three parts:
 1. Foot washing - separated by men and women
 2. Shared Meal - during which testimonies of God’s faithfulness are welcome
 3. Bread and Cup - shared by individuals at their tables

ARTICLE XI

I. Restoration and Church Discipline

A. Applicable Individuals and General Guidelines

1. Only those individuals who are members of Soma Community Church are open for spiritual discipline by this body. If one does not see himself subject to this body of believers, he or she has not given any authority to other believers to be held accountable for his or her actions.
2. All members are subject to the restoration process including but not limited to: volunteers, laymen, elders, and house church leaders.
3. When a disagreement arises between individuals requiring church intervention it is the duty of the elders to insure that Matthew 18 has been already exhibited prior to involvement. Each elder must ask a party complaining of grievance if he or she has already attempted the process of Matthew 18 and understands that elder involvement is a last resort in the area of personal grievance.
4. It is recommended that the “take another brother with you” from Matthew 18 be that of one’s House Church leader or fellow house church member, but not required.
5. Private sin will be treated with privacy except in the instance of consequences that affect independent unaware parties. In such cases said parties will be made aware of possible effect. (i.e. marital infidelity).
6. Public sin will be addressed publicly in an appropriate setting and in an appropriate manner with restoration and grace.
7. Any wrong doing involving the abuse of minor or the planning of harm to oneself or another individual will be reported to the state authorities immediately.
8. Any accusation believed to be plausible involving the abuse of a minor or sexual harassment of any kind will immediately suspend the accused of his or her responsibilities within the body until further investigation and in no way is an admission of guilt.

B. Repentant Process

1. Grievance or accusation of another member in the church body shall be submitted in writing and any evidence presented in writing.
2. Two or three elders will lovingly confront the individual(s) involved with evidence and written grievance.
3. As a rule elders shall always respond to personal, willing repentance and confession of sin with joy and grace. Such instances are to be celebrated. An elder will be assigned to the individual for counseling and to accompany the individual through any resulting consequences.
4. The individual(s) will with the help and guidance of the elders seek restitution and forgiveness of the parties involved.

5. When necessary the elders will refer specific counseling needs to qualified, Christ-centered sources.

C. Unrepentant Process

1. Grievance or accusation of another member in the church body shall be submitted in writing and any evidence presented in writing.
2. Two or three elders will lovingly confront the individual(s) involved with evidence and written grievance.
3. If the accusation is denied the elders will then on the basis of facts and accusations determine whether to return to the accusing party to recheck information or again confront the individual accused.
4. If after no less than three separate conversations with elders in a period of no less than three weeks, the individual is unwilling to repent of his or her wrong doing and is openly and factually living in defiance to God and his word, said individual will be placed under spiritual discipline consisting of one or all of the following.
 1. Removal of membership and service
 2. Forbidden from attending his or her house church
 3. Be provided with service that would aid in the continuance his or her wrong doing.
 5. A statement regarding the churches action will be placed in the bulletin for two consecutive weeks.

D. Petition of Discipline

1. Petition of discipline may be submitted in writing by the accused party to the elders up to one month after the decision of discipline.
2. Upon petition the individual accused is requesting that a body of three peers chosen by 2/3 majority of members, one staff members chosen at 2/3 majority by the staff, and two elders appointed by 2/3 majority from the elders having no personal affiliation with the accused be procured for review of his or her appeal.
3. Upon petition the individual accused understands that said body will be privileged to any confidential information regarding his or her instance.
4. Said body will keep any information surrounding an appeal that is not public knowledge, private until a verdict has been reached.
5. If it is found that the discipline is fitting and necessary the church will proceed with the enactment of said discipline.
6. If other actions are found to be required or more fitting than initially mandated, such actions will be advised by the reviewing body.

7. At any point in the process repentance that results in change of action and humility will be treated with joy and grace.

ARTICLE XII

I. Staff/Volunteers

- A. Any Staff or Volunteers working with children and/or teens will be required to pass a background check.
- B. To better ensure burn out does not occur Volunteers will be encouraged to pick one area in the body to serve and focus on this commitment. Serious consideration will be given before accepting the service of a HC leader in an other area of public service in the church body.
- C. The first large gathering after christmas / surrounding the new year will be cancelled annually to allow volunteers and families to spend time with one another.
- D. Staff will be hired by the elders per the steps outlined in Article II.
- E. At no time can the staff payroll exceed 25% of the total budget.

ARTICLE XIII

I. Amendments

- A. An announcement from the “pulpit” on two successive Sundays and two insertions in church publications of such proposed amendment shall be considered sufficient notice.
- B. This Constitution may be amended, repealed, or altered, in whole or in part, by a two-thirds (2/3) vote at any duly organized elder meeting. Sufficient notice shall be an announcement from the pulpit on two (2) successive Sundays with a written distribution containing the full text of the amendment proposed for consideration and member ratification.
- C. It is understood that a Manual of Procedure may be developed by the Elders-Overseers to define those activities through which the concepts and principles of this Constitution will be implemented.