

CONSTITUTION  
MERCY BAPTIST CHURCH

PREAMBLE

We, the members of Mercy Baptist Church of West Chester, Ohio, do ordain and establish the following articles to which we voluntarily submit ourselves.

## **ARTICLE I – NAME**

The name of this church will be Mercy Baptist Church.

## **ARTICLE II – AFFILIATION**

### **Section 1**

Mercy Baptist Church may and does cooperate with other likeminded churches in matters of mutual interest and concern. We may seek the assistance and counsel of other churches in matters of special concern to us, but the decision of no other church or group of churches will at any time be acknowledged as binding on this church.

### **Section 2**

We acknowledge no ecclesiastical authority other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23) and who directs the affairs of the church through elders chosen and ordained according to the precepts of Holy Scripture. The elders themselves at all times and in all their activities stand under the authority of Holy Scripture.

## **ARTICLE III – PURPOSE**

The purpose of Mercy Baptist Church is to glorify the God of the Scriptures in promoting his worship, evangelizing sinners, and edifying saints. Therefore, we are committed to the proclamation of God's perfect law and the glorious Gospel of his grace through all of the world and to the defense of "the faith once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

## **ARTICLE IV – ARTICLES OF FAITH**

We adopt as the fullest expression of our faith the London Confession of Faith of 1689 in either its original or modernized editions.<sup>1</sup> The ultimate authority in all matters of faith, order, and morals is and must be the Bible alone, which truth is clearly set forth in the opening article of the Confession itself. This historic document is, however, an excellent summary of "the things most surely believed among us," and we find it to be of assistance in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness.<sup>2</sup>

The statement of faith does not exhaust the extent of our beliefs. The Bible itself, as the inspired and infallible Word of God that speaks with final authority concerning truth, morality, and the proper conduct of mankind, is the sole and final source of all that we believe. For purposes of Mercy Baptist Church's faith, doctrine, practice, policy, and discipline, our elders are Mercy Baptist Church's final interpretive authority on the Bible's meaning and application.

## **ARTICLE V – MEMBERSHIP**

### **Section 1 – Requirements for Membership**

Any person who professes repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, with a credible public testimony of a life transformed by the power of Christ, who expresses substantial agreement with the doctrines and aims of the church, and who is willing to submit to its government will be eligible for membership in it.

As a church, we practice baptism by immersion. Therefore, baptism is strongly urged upon each one applying for membership and, in most cases, is required. Exceptions are subject to the examination and consideration of the eldership and the will of the assembly.

### **Section 2 – Types of Membership**

Each member of the church is acknowledged to form a vital part of the body and to have a peculiar function in the life of that body (1 Corinthians 12:14–27). Practical considerations, however, require that certain distinctions be recognized in the membership of the church.

**Paragraph A, Full Members:** All who are received into the membership of the church according to the procedures set forth in Section 3 of this Article, who continue in their interest in the church and attendance in church meetings, who do not come under the corrective discipline of the church (defined in Article VI) will be considered regular members in good standing and entitled to all the rights and privileges of membership in the church. A roll of the members' names and addresses will be maintained.

**Paragraph B, Temporary Members:** Persons who come to live in our area for a limited period of time (e.g., college students, military personnel, people on special work assignments) may be received into the membership of the church on the same basis and in the same manner as persons who have a permanent residence in our geographical area. If such person is already a member of a church in their place of permanent residence, they do not need be released from the membership of their "home church," but will be regarded as a temporary member while in our midst, enjoying all the rights and privileges of regular membership. When such person terminates their period of temporary residence and leaves our area, they will automatically be released to the fellowship of their "home church" and no longer be regarded as a member of this church.

**Paragraph C, Associate Members:** Regular members who move away from our area and who cannot find another local church with which they can conscientiously unite will, at their request, be retained as associate members of this church.

Such members must maintain regular communication with the church in order to maintain their associate membership in it. Nevertheless, they are urged to diligently seek a church with which they can unite elsewhere. An associate member will not be allowed to vote in any business meeting of the church. At the discretion of the elders, associate membership may also be granted to invalids, Christian workers, and others whose relationship to the church involves unusual circumstances.

### **Section 3 – Procedures in Reception of New Members**

Paragraph A: A person who desires to become a member of the church should apply to the elders and request to be interviewed by them. During the interview, the elders will seek to determine whether that person has a credible profession of faith in Christ, has been baptized according to the Scriptures upon profession of faith, is in substantial agreement with the doctrines of the church, and intends to give wholehearted support to its ministry and submit to its discipline.

Paragraph B: If the applicant is or has been a member of another church, special effort will be made to determine the person's standing in that church and their reasons for leaving. At the discretion of the elders, a letter of inquiry concerning the person's standing may be sent to that church before their acceptance as a member of this church is determined.

Paragraph C: When the elders are satisfied that the applicant meets the requirements for membership, they will announce the same to the congregation at a stated meeting of the church. Time will be allowed for objections or questions to be raised by any member concerning the applicant's manner of life or doctrine. If questions or objections are raised, the elders should postpone the vote on that applicant's membership until proper investigation can be made concerning objections, which in their judgment are sufficiently serious. If no objection is raised, which the elders consider to be valid, the members present will vote on the acceptance of the applicant. Upon acceptance, the person will be publicly received into the membership at a stated meeting of the church.

#### **Section 4 – Termination of Membership**

Paragraph A, By Physical Death: When a member of the church is removed from our midst by death, their name will be removed from the membership roll.

Paragraph B, By Transfer: When requested, the church should grant to a departing member in good standing a letter of dismissal to the fellowship of another church. No such letter may be given to a member who is, at the time, under the corrective discipline of this church. The church should refuse to grant a letter of transfer to any church which is, in its judgment, disloyal to "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3), or which does not exercise godly care over its members. The elders will be responsible for drafting of the letter.

Paragraph C, By Exclusion: If a member is habitually absent from the meetings of the church without showing just cause, or if due to relocation he ceases to maintain vital contact with the church, they may be excluded from membership by the recommendation of the eldership and majority vote of the church. If an excluded member applies again for membership, the same procedures set forth in Section 3 of this Article will be followed.

Paragraph D, By Excommunication: According to the teaching of Holy Scripture, a congregation must cut off from its fellowship and visible membership any person who teaches or insists on holding false or heretical doctrine, who blatantly and persistently conducts themselves in a manner inconsistent with their Christian profession, or who persists in disturbing the unity or peace of the church (Matthew 18:15ff; 1 Corinthians 5:1ff). The procedure to be followed in such excommunication is defined in a later Article VI.

#### **Section 5 – Conduct of Members**

Paragraph A, Means of Grace: All public and private means of grace, such as regular attendance at the services and meetings of the church, daily systematic reading of the Bible, and private and family prayers will be urged upon our members.

Paragraph B, Government of the Home: The church expects its members to follow the Scriptures in home government. God has required that godliness in the home has a high priority in every life. The home holds a central attention in God's Law and is the object of frequent exhortations in the New Testament. Men are expected to rule their homes with gentleness, but firmness. Women must be submissive to their husbands in everything (1 Peter 3:1; 1 Tim. 3:11). Parents should train their children in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4) by holy example, teaching, consistent education, and firm biblical discipline. Children must reverently obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1). These primary responsibilities, prayerfully applied, will honor the name of Christ in the community and strengthen the cause of Christ in generations to come.

Paragraph C, Missions and Personal Evangelism: It is the duty of every Christian individually, and as a member of the local church, to labor for the extension of the kingdom of God. Therefore, every member of this church is encouraged prayerfully to recognize and to seize every reasonable opportunity to bear witness to their faith in Christ, both by Christian conduct and by personal testimony. Beyond this, we, the members of Mercy Baptist Church are committed to common efforts for sending the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Paragraph D, Principles of Giving: Since it is clearly taught in Scripture that Christians should support financially the work of the Lord by systematic and proportionate giving made through the local church ([Psalm 37:21](#); 1 Corinthians 16:1–2; 2 Corinthians 8–9), all the members of this church are encouraged to conform to this rule of Scripture. The tithe (10 percent of one's income) is not a commandment for the New Covenant people of God, but is a helpful pattern for each member as an expression of worship and the biblical norm for basic giving, to which should be added gifts and offerings according to one's ability and the willingness of their heart (2 Corinthians 8:1–5; 2 Corinthians 9:7).

Paragraph E, Concern for Other Members and This Church as a Body: Inasmuch as the church is represented in Scripture as a body having many members, each of the members having its particular function, and yet having a concern for the health and protection of the whole (1 Corinthians 12:12–27; Ephesians 4:4, 11–16), this church expects that each of its members will strive for the good of the entire body. The members must actively seek and cultivate acquaintance with one another so that they may be better able to pray for one another; love, comfort, and encourage one another; and help one another materially as necessity may require. They must refrain from speaking ill of one another and must keep in strict confidence all matters of private concern to the church.

Paragraph F, Christian Liberty: Each member of the church is required to render in their daily life loyal obedience to all the moral precepts established in the Word of God (Romans 8:3–4). If God has not condemned or forbidden a practice in his Word, a Christian is at liberty to participate in it. The exercise of Christian liberty, however, must at all times be governed by an earnest desire to walk in the fear of God and to glorify him in all things (1 Peter 1:17; 1 Corinthians 10:31); a loving regard for the consciences of weaker brothers and sisters (1 Corinthians 8:9; Romans 15:1–3); a compassion for the lost (1 Corinthians 9:19–22); and a zealous regard for the health of one's own soul (Roman's 13:14; 1 Peter 2:16).

Paragraph G, Submission to Leadership: All who come into the membership of this church are expected to recognize and submit to the authority of the overseers of the church (1 Corinthians 16:15–16; I Thessalonians 5:12–13; Hebrews 13:17).

## **ARTICLE VI – CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

### **Section 1 – Formative Discipline**

Every disciple (follower) of Christ must be under his discipline (His instruction and correction), which is administered to each one through the church according to 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, along with other passages. Mutual submission to one another and to the overseers (elders) whom the Lord has set over his church (Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5) will result in the sanctification of each member individually and of the whole body of the church collectively. There are occasions, however, when failure in the application of this formative discipline makes the application of corrective discipline necessary.

### **Section 2 – Corrective Discipline**

Paragraph A, General Statement: Corrective discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine or disorderly or scandalous conduct appears among the members of the church. In all such cases, reasonable efforts must be made to resolve the difficulty, correct error, and remove offense through counsel and admonition before more drastic steps are taken (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19–20). The principles given to us in Matthew 18:15–16 and 1 Corinthians 5:1–13 must be carefully followed in all cases of corrective discipline.

Paragraph B, Suspension: (1) Any conduct on the part of a member, which disturbs the peace of the church or prejudices its testimony, may require action of the elders to debar the offending brother or sister from participating in certain activities of the church according to the gravity of the offense. The suspension will be announced to the congregation by the elders and will remain in force until the suspended member gives evidence of true repentance and change of conduct. When a suspended member can be restored to full fellowship, this also will be announced to the congregation by the elders. While a member is under such discipline, they will be treated by the congregation according to the directions given in 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15. Although such a person is considered to be walking disorderly, they must still be regarded as a member and not as one cut off from the church. (2) If a member has sinned publicly, but shows hopeful signs of repentance, including submission to the admonition of the elders, it may still be necessary to suspend them for a time from some of the privileges of membership lest reproach be brought upon the church, lest others be emboldened to sin, and lest the offender fails to test their own soul and realize the gravity of their offense. Those who humbly submit to the imposed discipline will afterwards be wholly forgiven and publicly received back into the full fellowship of the church. (3) In the case where a person is accused or suspected of gross sin and absents themselves from the congregation, refusing to meet with the elders so that the matter may be investigated, the elders will announce to the congregation that the person is suspended from the membership, and such suspension will continue in force as long as the conditions giving rise to it continue.

Paragraph C, Excommunication: (1) Some types of conduct must be categorized as “immoral” (1 Corinthians 5:9–11; 6:9–10), and a member unrepentant of such conduct must be cut off from the

fellowship of the church (1 Corinthians 5:3–5, 13; Matthew 18:17). In such case, the whole church family will make earnest efforts to bring the offender to true repentance and reformation, but if these efforts fail, they will report the same to the congregation at a regular or specially-called business meeting of the church and recommend that the offender be excommunicated, which must be done according to Scripture (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:4), by action of the entire church. An act of excommunication must have the approval of at least two-thirds of the members present and voting. (2) Likewise, some wrong opinions regarding the doctrines of Scripture are so serious that they must be categorized as “Heretical” (Galatians 1:6–9; 1 Timothy 4:1), and a member who persists in propagating or holding any such opinion, in spite of earnest and patient admonition by the church, will be excommunicated in the same manner as an immoral person.

## **ARTICLE VII – BAPTISM AND THE LORD’S SUPPER**

### **Section 1 – General Statement**

There are two ordinances (or sacraments) of special significance, which our Lord has commanded us to observe, namely, *baptism* and *the Lord’s Supper* (also called “the Lord’s table” or “communion”). Neither of them has saving merit, nor is any grace imparted to the recipient through the water of baptism or the bread and the cup of the Supper. These ordinances are not means of “special grace,” but they are “special *means* of grace” and powerful aids to the faith of the believers who participate in them.

### **Section 2 – Baptism**

Only confessed disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ are proper candidates for baptism, and all such persons should be baptized (Acts 2:38). Believing that baptism is the God-ordained door of entrance into the visible community of the people of God, we will receive into the membership of the church those who have been baptized in the biblical manner, which is by immersion and “into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).<sup>3</sup>

### **Section 3 – The Lord’s Supper**

Whereas baptism is the initiatory ordinance or sacrament by which one enters the visible church and should be observed only once by each believer, the Lord’s Supper should be celebrated frequently by the assembled church (1 Corinthians 11:26). While this is a most holy ordinance and should be observed with solemnity and dignity, the bread and the cup of the supper are and remain only symbols of the broken body and the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because communion is a holy privilege to partake together, it should be celebrated frequently in accordance with Paul’s instructions to do it “as often as you [do] it” (1 Cor. 11:25). The frequency of celebrating Lord’s Supper will be determined by the elders.

## **ARTICLE VIII – OFFICERS**

### **Section 1 – General Statement**

Jesus Christ alone is the Head of the church (Colossians 1:18), and he governs his church through office-bearers (or officers) whom he appoints and who are endowed by his Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work. Officers in the church are of two kinds, *elders* (also called “overseers” or “pastors”) and *deacons* (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1–13). It is the duty of the church to seek and discover among its members those to whom Christ the Lord has imparted the necessary gifts and calling for office-bearing, and after formally recognizing them by congregational election, to set them apart by united prayer, and then to submit to their authority.

## **Section 2 – Elders**

**Paragraph A:** The qualifications for a man chosen to fill the office of elder are clearly set forth in Scripture, particularly in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9. Elders of Mercy Baptist Church must always be male as God commands.

**Paragraph B:** The Scriptures indicate that ideally two or more men (1Tim 3:1) should be raised as elders in the local church (Acts 20:17; Philippians 1:1) to form a plurality of elders. These men are also called “overseers” because they are charged with the oversight of the assembly (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). They are the “pastors and teachers” given to the church to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11–12).

**Paragraph C:** Since the responsibilities of this office are numerous and grave, it is highly desirable that at least one elder should devote himself full-time to the work of the ministry and the oversight of the church. Such elders are traditionally referred to as “pastors” (though non-vocational elders are also pastors, for they all share the pastoral responsibility) because they “labor in the word and in teaching” (1 Timothy 5:17). The church is responsible to give generous financial support to such men (1 Corinthians 9:9–11; 1 Timothy 5:17–18), and it is free to invite men from outside the local congregation to come into its midst and serve in this capacity. Any man thus called to this office must be able conscientiously to affirm his agreement with the church’s confession of faith and the Constitution and Bylaws of the church. Should he at any time move from this position, he is under spiritual and moral obligation to make this fact known to the church with the church body then taking appropriate action.

**Paragraph D:** Elders are responsible for the spiritual ministrations of the church, the implementation of discipline, and the oversight of the souls of the church’s members “as those who give account” to God (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 4:2–3). While every elder should be “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 2:24), some will be more engaged in formal and public teaching, while others will be more engaged in pastoring (that is, private teaching and admonishing) and oversight, each according to how God has gifted him. Gifted men who are not recognized as elders may engage in public preaching and teaching, provided they are godly in character and walk, but the exercise of their gift must be under the direction and control of the elders.

**Paragraph E:** While elders are overseers of the flock, they are themselves members of the flock. Therefore, each elder, as an individual, is under the oversight of his fellow elders and is subject to the same discipline as are all the members of the church.

**Paragraph F:** The church should endeavor to discover all the men whom the Holy Spirit has endowed with the requisite gifts and graces, who are willing to serve in such a capacity. Then the



church should formally recognize who God has set over the church. Thus, when men have been ordained to this office, the church will have the confidence that it has recognized the overseers, whom the Holy Spirit has set over it (Acts 20:28). The number of elders and their length of office is determined by the members of the church (see Article VIII, Section 4, Paragraph B for current guidelines on terms and reelections).

### **Section 3 – Deacons**

Paragraph A: In the same way as elders, deacons must be biblically willing and qualified (1 Timothy 3:8–13).

Paragraph B: Deacons are responsible to exemplarily serve and coordinate service among the members so that the church may be unified, and the elders may devote themselves without distraction to the prayer and the Word (Acts 6:3–4). They must fulfill the duties of their office in cooperation with and in subjection to the elders.

Paragraph C: The number of deacons is not to be fixed. The church will choose as many as are needed for the work to be done from among the willing men who give evidence of having the scriptural qualifications for that office (Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:8–13).

### **Section 4 – Appointment of Officers**

Paragraph A: The local church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is responsible to appoint men to the office of elder and deacon. Each individual involved should have an inward conviction that the Lord is calling him to the particular office, and the church should recognize that call as it observes in the individual evidence of the gifts and graces which Scripture requires for the particular office. This is a matter of such gravity that it should be accompanied by much prayer to God for guidance, a careful perusal of the relevant passages of Scripture, and a dispassionate evaluation of each man nominated to a particular office. These activities are the responsibility of each individual member of the church as well as of the church as whole.

Paragraph B: Nominations to the offices of elder and deacon will be made by the elders alone. They may at any time during the year nominate as many candidates as they see fit to either office and call a congregational business meeting for their consideration. In no case may a man be nominated to either office without his knowledge and prior consent.

Should there be no eldership already in place, a temporary committee will be chosen by the membership from among membership to nominate willing and qualified individuals. These individuals will be nominated by the committee prior to a business meeting of the church, and will propose as few or as many qualified individuals as they sees fit for either office.

Paragraph C: When the time comes to vote on the nomination during a business meeting of the church, the candidate for office and any members of his immediate family who are present will be requested to leave the room while his qualifications are openly discussed by the entire congregation in the fear of God and the light of Scripture. After that discussion, a written ballot will be taken. It is hoped that the vote of the congregation will in such matters always be unanimous, but if unanimity is not realized, no less than a two-thirds (2/3) majority of the members present and voting will be required for the election of an officer.

Paragraph D: Following the recognition of an officer by vote of the congregation, he will be publicly installed in his office at a regular worship service by the prayer of the whole church.

Paragraph E: Officers are subject to the same rules of discipline as are other members of the church. They will hold office as long as they are faithful to their calling and have the confidence of the congregation. The church will reconfirm (or express the withdrawal of) its confidence in each of its officers at its annual meeting three (3) years following the date of his installation and every three (3) years thereafter in the manner designated in Paragraph C of this section. An officer may, however, resign his office without prejudice if for good and valid reasons he finds he is no longer able to discharge the duties of it.

Paragraph F: The elders will choose one of the officers to chair each business meeting.

## **ARTICLE IX – FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**

### **Section 1 – Treasurer**

The church will appoint a treasurer, a non-officer position in the church. Candidates for treasurer will be nominated by the elders. The treasurer will be elected for a three-year term by a two-thirds (2/3) majority of the members present and voting at a duly convened business meeting of the congregation. The treasurer may not be a vocational officer of the church. The treasurer may select an assistant who is approved by the elders to act on behalf of the treasurer as necessary. At the end of each 3-year term, the existing treasurer may be reaffirmed by vote to remain treasurer for the next term with no limit on the number of consecutive terms served.

### **Section 2 – Budgeting**

Paragraph A – Prior to the end of each calendar year, the elders, deacons, and treasurer will meet to prepare a proposed budget for the next calendar year. The treasurer should distribute to each church member a copy of the proposed budget at least two weeks prior to the meeting. The treasurer will present the proposed budget at a duly convened business meeting of the congregation prior to the end of the fiscal year. The proposed budget must be approved by a vote of at least two-thirds (2/3) of the members present. If the proposed budget is not approved, the elders, deacons, and treasurer will reconvene to revise the budget and seek congregational approval as set forth in Paragraph A—except that the revised proposed budget need not be distributed prior to the business meeting in which it is voted upon. At the discretion of the elders, such revisions may occur and be voted upon in the same business meeting as the original budget proposal if the changes are minor. The revision process will continue until a budget is approved by the congregation.

Paragraph B – Both projected income and expenditures will be included in the budget. The expectation in nearly all cases is that the projected expenses for the budget do not substantially exceed projected income. Any individual expenditure or set of similar expenditures that is estimated to exceed \$5000 during the year will be identified as a separate line item in the budget.

Paragraph C – The treasurer and deacons will prepare proposed individual compensation packages for each elder who receives compensation from the church. Elder compensation packages will be approved by the congregation as a part of the proposed budget as set forth in Paragraph A above.

### **Section 3 – Expenditures**

Paragraph A – An elder must authorize all expenditures not within the approved budget. The elders may authorize members to make ongoing expenditures for approved budget items. The treasurer will issue payment for duly authorized expenditures and reimburse members who make authorized expenditures and provide supporting receipts or other acceptable documentation to the treasurer.

Paragraph B – Except as set forth in Paragraph C below, no one may authorize an expenditure for which sufficient budgeted funds are not available or authorize an expense in excess of \$750 that will likely cause a later budget overrun. If the treasurer or an elder has reason to believe the expenditures for a particular line item will exceed the approved budget before year end, all of the elders will be notified of the issue as soon as is practical. If the elders and treasurer agree an increase in the budget is warranted, the elders will bring the matter before the congregation at a duly convened business meeting. A two-thirds vote of the members present is required to change the approved budget. If the budgeted funds for a line item are exhausted, spending for that line item will cease until additional budgeted funds are approved. No one may knowingly shift expenditures from one line item to another to avoid a budget overrun.

Paragraph C – In emergency cases where all of the elders agree an expenditure must be approved immediately but insufficient budgeted funds are available, the elders may approve the expenditure; or, if there is only one elder, the elder and the treasurer must agree to approve the expenditure. When an emergency expenditure occurs, the elders must announce the matter at the next meeting of the church, and the congregation must approve the budget change by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the members present at the next duly convened business meeting.

### **Section 4 – Reporting**

Within the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter after the close of each calendar year, the treasurer will provide to the congregation a financial report showing the actual results compared to the budget for the just concluded year.

### **Section 5 – Property and Assets**

Paragraph A - The church will have the power to receive, either by gift or purchase, and so hold such real, personal, or mixed property as is authorized by the laws of the State of Ohio and is deemed necessary for the functioning of the church, and will have the power to dispose of such property by mortgage, bill of sale, deed, or otherwise. All property will be held in the name of the church.

Paragraph B - In such event (Paragraph A), the church must do so through the recommendation of the elders, then said purchase agreement must be ratified by a two-thirds (2/3) majority of the membership at a duly called business meeting.

## **ARTICLE X – SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE**

We believe that all human life is sacred and created by God in his image. Human life is of inestimable worth in all its dimensions, including pre-born babies, the aged, the physically or mentally challenged, and every other stage or condition from conception through natural death. We are therefore called to defend, protect, and value all human life (Psalm 139).

## **ARTICLE XI – MARRIAGE, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY**

### **Section 1:**

We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God (Genesis 1:26–27). Rejection of one’s biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person.

### **Section 2:**

We believe that the term “marriage” has only one meaning: the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union for life, as delineated in Scripture (Genesis 2:18–25). We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other (1 Corinthians 6:18; 7:2–5; Hebrews 13:4). We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman.

### **Section 3:**

We believe that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, and use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God (Matthew 15:18–20; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10).

**Section 4:** We believe that in order to preserve the function and integrity of Mercy Baptist Church as the local body of Christ, and to provide a biblical role model to the Mercy Baptist Church’s members and the community, it is imperative that all persons employed by Mercy Baptist Church in any capacity, or who serve as volunteers, agree to and abide by this statement on Marriage, Gender, and Sexuality (Matthew 5:16; Philippians 2:14–16; 1 Thessalonians 5:22).

### **Section 5:**

We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking his mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ (Acts 3:19–21; Romans 10:9–10; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

### **Section 6:**

We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity (Mark 12:28–31; Luke 6:31). Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any

individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture nor the doctrines of Mercy Baptist Church.<sup>1</sup>

### **Section 7:**

Because God has ordained marriage and defined it as the covenant relationship between a man, a woman, and Himself, Mercy Baptist Church will only recognize marriages between a biological man and a biological woman. Further, the elders and staff of Mercy Baptist Church will only participate in weddings and solemnize marriages between one man and one woman. Finally, the facilities and property of Mercy Baptist Church will only host weddings between one man and one woman.

## **ARTICLE XII – TRUSTEES**

### **Section 1**

**Paragraph A:** In order to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,” this church was incorporated as “Forest Park Community Church” under the laws of the State of Ohio on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1971. Our Certificate of Incorporation requires that a “board of directors” (or “trustees”) be elected by the church. Though trustees are a non-officer elected position in the church, they represent the church in all its relations with civil government. Amendment to those filings was made effective September 23, 2020 to change the name of the church to Mercy Baptist Church.

**Paragraph B:** Since trustees are not a biblical position, but a legal position under the oversight of the elders, Mercy Baptist Church’s trustees should therefore normally consist of no less than three of the current elders. If, however, at any time there is not a sufficient number of elders, the remainder of the trustees will be elected for three-year terms from among the deacons or other voting members of the church. The trustees are under the oversight and leadership of the elders and ultimately of the congregation at large and cannot make decisions of their own.

### **Section 2**

The trustees will consist of three members, at least one of whom will be elected by the corporation (the church) at each annual congregational meeting for a term of three years. Each member so elected will hold office until their successor will be elected and qualified. A trustee may be elected to succeed themselves.

### **Section 3**

The trustees will perform such legal and business transactions as are specifically designated to them by the laws of the State of Ohio. In the discharge of their duties, they will act only at the direction of the officers of the church.

## **ARTICLE XIII – CONGREGATIONAL BUSINESS MEETINGS**

### **Section 1 – General Statement**

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<sup>1</sup> These first six paragraphs have adapted from the Alliance Defending Freedom’s Protestant Statement on Marriage, Gender, and Sexuality.

There will be an annual business meeting of the church for the hearing of reports, the election of officers, or the transaction of such other business as may properly be brought before the meetings. Special business meetings may be called at other times at the discretion of the elders.

Godliness, order, and propriety will rule the business meetings of our church. While we do not mandate any specific set of rules, the current editions of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised In Brief* and its fuller counterpart, *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, may be utilized to this end, so long as they are not inconsistent with the church's doctrine or bylaws.

## **Section 2 – Notice of Meetings**

Paragraph A: Notice of all congregational business meetings will be given at least two weeks prior immediately prior to the meetings. However, in the case of an emergency, a meeting may be called by the elders on shorter notice by notifying each regular member of the time, place, and purpose of the meeting.

Paragraph B: Meetings for the hearing of special reports or for seeking the counsel of the congregation may be called on shorter notice, but no vote may be taken or other business transacted at such meeting.

## **Section 3 – Quorum**

A majority of the regular members must be present (either in person or via audio/video conference) for a properly convened congregational business meeting.

## **Section 4 – Chairmanship**

The elders will designate someone to preside business meetings.

## **Section 5 – Voting**

Paragraph A: All regular members who reached the age of eighteen years, who are in good standing in the church, and are present (in person or via audio/video conferencing) may vote on any question properly brought before the congregation.

Paragraph B: Unanimity of heart and mind under God will at all times be sought and prayed for (Acts 6:5), but when unanimity is not realized, not less than a two-thirds (2/3) majority of the members present and voting will be required to make a resolution valid.

## **ARTICLE XIV – FACILITY USE POLICY**

Paragraph A: The church's facilities were provided through God's benevolence and by the sacrificial generosity of church members. The church desires that its facilities be used for the fellowship of the body of Christ and to bring God glory. Although the facilities are not generally

open to the public, we may make our facilities available to approved non-members as a witness to our faith, in a spirit of Christian charity, and as a means of demonstrating the Gospel of Jesus Christ in practice.

Paragraph B: But facility use will not be permitted to persons or groups holding, advancing, or advocating beliefs or practices that conflict with the church's faith or moral teachings, which are summarized in, among other places, the church's Constitution and Bylaws. Nor may church facilities be used for activities that contradict, or are deemed inconsistent with, the church's faith or moral teachings. The elders are the final decision-maker concerning use of church facilities, utilizing the service of the deacons or trustees as they deem fit.

Paragraph C: This restricted facility use policy is necessary for two important reasons. First, the church may not in good conscience materially cooperate in activities or beliefs that are contrary to its faith. Allowing its facilities to be used for purposes that contradict the church's beliefs would be material cooperation with that activity, and would be a grave violation of the church's faith and religious practice (2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:22).

Paragraph D: Second, it is very important that the church present a consistent message to the community, and that the church staff and members conscientiously maintain that message as part of their witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Allowing facilities to be used by groups or persons who express beliefs or engage in practices contrary to the church's faith would have a severe, negative impact on the message that the church strives to promote. It could also cause confusion and scandal to church members and the community because they may reasonably perceive that by allowing use of our facilities, the church agrees with the beliefs or practices of the persons or groups using its facilities.

Paragraph E: Therefore, in no event will persons or groups who hold, advance, or advocate beliefs, or advance, advocate, or engage in practices that contradict the church's faith use any church facility, nor may church facilities be used in any way that contradicts the church's faith. Paragraph 6: This policy applies to all church facilities, regardless of whether the facilities are connected to the church's sanctuary, because the church sees all of its property as holy and set apart to worship God (Colossians 3:17).

Paragraph F: Approved Users and Priority of Use

The elders must approve all uses of church facilities. Generally, priority will be given to church members, their immediate families, and organized groups that are part of the ministry, organization, or sponsored activities of the church. Church facilities and equipment will be made available to non-members or outside groups meeting the following qualifications:

1. Groups or persons requesting facility use must affirm that their beliefs and practices and planned uses of the facilities are consistent with the church's faith and practice.
2. The group or person seeking facility use must submit a signed "Church Facility Reservation Request and Agreement" form.
3. The group or person seeking facility use must be willing to take responsibility for the facilities and equipment used and must agree to abide by the church's rules of conduct for facility use, as stated in the attached form and as described in any additional instructions by church staff.

## ARTICLE XV – DISSOLUTION

### Section 1: Beginning the Process of Dissolution

Upon the recommendation of the elders, the board of directors (trustees) along with the congregation will informally agree to begin a process of dissolution.

### Section 2: Responsibilities at Dissolution

Paragraph A - The period of duration of the church is perpetual. However, in the event of dissolution of Mercy Baptist Church (“the church”; located at 6840 Fountains Blvd., West Chester, OH 45069), the property and all assets will be sold, either through private or public sale. Then, every effort will be made to satisfy all debts prior to formal dissolution.

Paragraph B - After outstanding debts are satisfied and to the degree it is able, the church will provide six (6) months of severance pay for any employed pastor, preferably from its liquid assets. In the event the pastor(s) assume another employed ministerial position, the financial support would terminate upon remuneration from his new ministry. The church will also provide support for current missionaries of the church at an amount equivalent to three (3) months support.

Paragraph C - The board of directors will make a recommendation to the church as to how the remaining assets should be distributed. No assets will go to the private inurement of any of the church’s members. The membership should consider this recommendation and either accept it or amend it to be distributed according to a two-thirds (2/3) majority.

Paragraph D - All assets remaining after payment, or provision for payment, of all debts and liabilities of the church will be distributed to another church(es), corporation(s), or other like-minded Christian organizations that are in agreement with beliefs of the church for one or more exempt purposes within the meaning of "Internal Revenue Code of 1986," 100 Stat. 2085, 26 U.S.C. 1, as amended.

### Section 3: Formal Dissolution

Upon the recommendation of the board of directors (trustees), dissolution of Mercy Baptist Church is to be formally instituted when a two-thirds (2/3) majority of the eligible members present at a duly called congregational meeting vote in favor of dissolving the corporation, Mercy Baptist Church.

### Section 4: Finalizing Dissolution

After having satisfied any debts, provided any pastoral severance, and distributed any assets to charitable institutions, the board of directors will ensure, through a legal representative if necessary, that all local, state, and federal agencies are notified and all steps required by them for the church’s official dissolution will be legally filed.

## ARTICLE XVI – AMENDMENTS

### Section 1



This Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds (2/3) majority of the members present and voting at a duly convened business meeting of the congregation.

**Section 2**

No proposed amendment may be voted on which has not been distributed to the congregation in written form by at least two successive Sundays immediately prior to that meeting.

## **FOOTNOTES**

1. Such as *Things Most Surely Believed Among Us*, 1958, Evangelical Press (London), *A Faith to Confess*, 1975, Carey Publications Ltd., and *Confessing the Faith: The 1689 Baptist Confession for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 2012, Founders Press.
2. Mercy Baptist Church recognizes that there are differing views of the Sabbath question among Baptists of Reformed persuasion. Some are convinced that the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment is to be obeyed as a perpetual commandment; others are equally persuaded that the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment does not apply to believers today. Others are unconvinced of either position but seek further light. Therefore, Mercy Baptist Church does not require for membership commitment to Chapter 22, Section 7–8 of the 1689 Confession.

However, Mercy Baptist Church expects participation in church meetings by its members. No one should use the above paragraph as an excuse to neglect corporate worship, since gathering together is both a privilege and duty in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. The exception to Chapter 29, Section 4 on Baptism is stated in the membership article of the Constitution Section 1.

# Church Facility Reservation Request and Agreement

Name of person or organization requesting use of facilities: \_\_\_\_\_

Please state whether you are a:

- Church Member
- Church-Sponsored Ministry
- Non-Member
- Non-Member Group/Organization

Contact Information:

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

If the requested use is by an organization not affiliated with the church, please briefly state the organization's purpose and mission:

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Please list the organization's website, if any: \_\_\_\_\_

Please list the names of the organization's office-holders and leaders:

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Regardless of type of user, please describe which church facilities you are requesting use of and the purpose for which you intend to use the facilities:

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What date(s) and time(s) are you requesting to use the facilities:

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If you are requesting use of the church's facilities for a wedding and/or wedding reception, please list the names and contact information of the bride and groom:

Bride:

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# Church Facility Reservation Request and Agreement

Groom:

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Please list the name, contact information, and religious affiliation of the person officiating the wedding:

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Please describe the marriage preparation counseling or training undertaken by the bride and groom:

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**I affirm that:**

1. I understand that the church does not allow its facilities to be used in a way that contradicts its faith or by persons or groups holding beliefs that contradict the church's faith.
2. To the best of my knowledge the purpose for which I am requesting use of church facilities will not contradict the church's faith, and I commit to promptly disclose any potential conflict of which I am aware or become aware to church staff.
3. I am not aware of any beliefs that are professed by me or the organization I represent and which is requesting use of the church's facilities that contradict the beliefs of the church. I agree to promptly disclose any potential conflicts in belief to church staff.
4. I understand that upon approval of my facilities use request, I will need to provide a security deposit in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_, a certificate of insurance for at least \$ \_\_\_\_\_ of coverage, and any other fees required by the church.
5. I understand that the church does not allow its facilities to be generally available to the public, and that my use of these facilities is subject to the pastor's approval, which is conditioned in part on my agreement to the requirements in the "Church Facility Use Policy," a copy of which I have read and understood.
6. I understand that I will be responsible for any damages to the church facilities resulting from this proposed use of facilities.
7. The church believes disputes are to be worked out between parties without recourse to the courts. See, generally, Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 6. Accordingly, users of the facility agree to attempt resolution of any disputes through Christian mediation.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_