

Church Bylaws



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Legal Services

Michael Best – Michael Best is a full-service firm with multiple specializations in the legal, organizational, governance and other faith-based issues affecting nonprofits and churches. Michael Best offers consulting services and legal advice in these areas and many others. Church leaders will appreciate their wise counsel, which is both proactive and price predictable.



Contact James Forrest



Contact Keith Richardson

Legal Protections

Legal protection from potential challenges and lawsuits is becoming more important in a changing U.S. cultural, political and judicial environment. Alliance Defending Freedom and other organizations recommend that churches address several key issues in their bylaws:

- Marriage & Sexuality
- Biblical Authority
- Membership Definition
- Member Discipline Procedures
- Procedure for Rescinding Membership



Suggested Language for Church Bylaws by ADF



Five Things All Churches Should Have in Their Bylaws by ADF

“Suggested Language for Church Bylaws” and “Five Things All Churches Should Have in Their Bylaws” from Alliance Defending Freedom

Marriage & Human Sexuality

Churches need a Biblical definition of marriage in their bylaws. This protects the church in the event an employee engages in an unbiblical sexual relationship or if an unmarried couple seeks to participate in events designed for married couples.

Churches may also be confronted with marriage candidates wanting to use church facilities and personnel for unbiblical civil unions and weddings.

Sample marriage and human sexuality language for use in a church constitution & bylaws might look like this:

Marriage – Marriage is an institution established by God as clearly described in the Bible. This church recognizes that marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. As a result of this firm belief, this church, its pastors, staff and members will not participate in same sex civil unions or same sex marriages, nor shall its property or resources be used for such purposes.

Human Sexuality – The Bible teaches that legitimate sexual relations are exercised solely within the God-ordained institution of marriage. This church regards as sinful and stands in opposition to all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, pornography or any attempt to change one's biological sex.



Sample Definition of Marriage



Sample Definition of Marriage



Covenant Marriage Summary



Covenant Marriage Summary



Covenant Marriage Position Paper

Biblical Authority Statements

Legal challenges to church policies or bylaws may require a ruling on the interpretation of Scripture. Defining a governing body or group as the church's sole authoritative interpreter of Scripture specifies how this will occur should a dispute or legal challenge arise.

Sample Biblical authority language for use in a church constitution & bylaws might look like this:

We accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God and as the ultimate authority in matters of faith, doctrine and Christian living. For purposes of church doctrine, practice, policy and discipline, our church-elected deacon body is the church's final interpretive authority on the Bible's meaning and application.

These Bylaws and any amendments made at a future date shall be the governing documents of this church but they should always be interpreted and applied in conformity with the Bible.

In addition, churches may reference a doctrinal or confessional statement in their Biblical authority statements. Southern Baptist churches might use language that references [The Baptist Faith and Message](#):

We accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God and as the ultimate authority in matters of faith, doctrine and Christian living. This church accepts "The Baptist Faith and Message," as most recently adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, as an affirmation of our basic Christian beliefs and as a general statement of our faith.

Alliance Defending Freedom sample language reads this way:

The statement of faith does not exhaust the extent of our faith. 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 church doctrine, practice, policy, and discipline, our [governing board][pastor][elders][Doctrinal Committee] is the church's final interpretive authority on the Bible's meaning and application.

"Suggested Language for Church Bylaws" from Alliance Defending Freedom

Membership Definition

Sample membership language for use in a church constitution & bylaws might look like this:

Every pastor, staff member and church member, by virtue of their membership in this church, affirms their agreement with the church's Bylaws and statements of faith and agrees to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with them.

Alliance Defending Freedom sample language reads this way:

The membership of this Church shall be composed of individuals who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and affirm the tenets of the the church's Constitution, and who offer evidence, by their confession and their conduct, that they are living in accord with their affirmations and this Constitution and Bylaws, and are actively pursuing and continuing in a vital fellowship with the Lord, Jesus Christ. The membership of the Church shall have final authority in all matters of church governance, as set forth and described in the Bylaws.

"Suggested Language for Church Bylaws" from Alliance Defending Freedom

Sample Church Bylaws by MinistryMaker

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