



# 2019 NCBC Constitution Revision FAQs

The following questions and answers are provided to help communicate the elders' intentions regarding the proposed revisions to our church constitution. If you have further questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to any of the elders at any time.

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## How can I get my further questions answered?

Elders will be available in the North Commons hospitality area on Sunday May 12<sup>th</sup> to help answer any questions you may have. You are also welcome to email or call any of the elders individually, or contact the church office with your questions:

[info@myncbc.org](mailto:info@myncbc.org) or (309) 447-6486. It is our joy to be able to listen, discuss, and pray with you in regards to any of your questions or concerns.

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*Questions related to our church constitution as a whole:*

### **What is the purpose of a church constitution?**

It's good to remember Christ's church existed for centuries without ever having formal constitutions. The primary reason we have a written constitution today is for legal recognition from our civil government. This means the first audience of our constitution is our state government, before our own membership. Our church constitution has never intended to be our highest governing document. The Holy Scriptures are our governing document. Our constitution is not our membership covenant. Church constitutions cannot protect a church from future failure or division. Only God's Spirit and His Word can sufficiently offer such security and assurance. We always want to be a church that points people to the Scriptures, more than to our own bylaws. Bylaws and constitutions have a good purpose in helping us to be legally recognized by our state. Constitutions are helpful, but they are not ultimate. Constitutions are clarifying, but they are not comprehensive. When it comes to how we shepherd our members and actually do ministry, constitutions simply aren't sufficient enough. Only God's Word is sufficiently authoritative for all of our life and godliness together.

### **Do our proposed revisions satisfy all legal requirements for church constitutions?**

Yes. We have consulted legal counsel from a trusted Christian attorney, and we are confident our constitution satisfies our legal requirements. To put minds at ease regarding our financial practices as well, we want to share that our recent outsourcing of all financial payables and payroll to a local accounting firm has effectively given us a financial review of all our financial practices as well.

### **Why do the elders desire to change NCBC's fiscal year?**

Currently NCBC has a calendar fiscal year, January 1 – December 31. However since the largest month of giving to NCBC is typically December, the elders desire a fiscal year-end that would time our budgeting planning process *after* the largest month of income has been realized. NCBC has changed our fiscal year before in our church's history – but this change always required a constitution revision. Since it is not legally required to specify the fiscal year in a church constitution, this revision removes it entirely, and leaves the setting of the specific dates of our fiscal year to the discretion of our elders.

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*Questions related to elders and deacons:*

### **What are the functional differences between elders and pastors at NCBC?**

Biblically there is no difference between elders (1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1-5), pastors (Ephesians 4:11), and overseers (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:1-7). All these terms describe the same spiritual leadership office of shepherding God's church. All spiritual shepherds share responsibility to teach God's Word (1 Timothy 3:2, 5:17; 2 Timothy 4:15; Hebrews

13:7; Jude 3), pray for the church (Acts 6:4; James 5:13-18); confront and correct those who believe or teach false doctrine (Titus 1:9; 2 Timothy 2:25); and equip each member for service to the Lord (Ephesians 4:11-12). All elders operate under the ultimate authority of the Chief Shepherd Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:4) as specified in the Word of God.

At NCBC, the distinction between elders and pastors is therefore only one of quantity of time, not quality of character. Our pastors are our vocational elders who dedicate their full-time employment to shepherding our church. Both lay and vocational elders share the same biblically-defined role and responsibilities. But our vocational elders, or pastors, usually have more time and training to employ in their shepherding. For example, 1 Timothy 5:17 may imply that some pastors work in a greater degree of preaching and teaching than other elders.

This constitution revision intentionally groups elders and pastors in the same section to emphasize the shared responsibilities of these two titles.

### **Why have the term limits been removed for both elders and deacons?**

Our existing constitution had no term limits on elders, but imposed six year term limits on deacons. The Scriptures do not specify term lengths for any spiritual leader, but refer to spiritual leadership as a calling of God's Spirit (Acts 20:28). This constitution revision removes all term limits for deacons, believing that all spiritual leaders should not be legally required to resign before the Holy Spirit would be finished with their ministry. There is also no expectation that any spiritual leader should serve longer than God would call them to serve in any leadership capacity in the church, and our elders employ periodic reviews of each of our elders and deacons to ensure that they are still serving as God would intend for the greater good and joy of His glory at NCBC.

### **What is God's design for the role of deacons within the church?**

A deacon is a recognized, God-called ministry leader in Jesus' church, equipped with the head, heart, hands, and home of a spiritual servant, who serves alongside other deacons and under the spiritual leadership of the elders in the church. The term "deacon" literally means "servant." Simply put, deacons are spiritually mature assistants to the elders who enable the elders to stay focused on the ministry of God's Word and prayer (Acts 6:4).

The biblical emphasis for deacons is on their spiritual maturity more than their specific responsibilities (1 Timothy 3:8-13). Therefore deacons are to be the personification of spiritual maturity in the body of Christ (c.f. Acts 6:3).

Scripture reveals some real distinctions between elders and deacons: elders are only male (1 Timothy 2:12-3:7; 1 Corinthians 14:34), while deacons may be male or female (1 Timothy 3:11; Romans 16:1). The elder's appointment transcends culture and is permanent, while a deacon's appointment may be culturally-specific and temporary.

According to Acts 6:4, elders focus primarily on spiritual priorities, while deacons may focus on both spiritual and physical leadership priorities within the church. Elders must be gifted to teach according to 1 Timothy 3:2, while deacons may or may not be gifted to teach. Elders together possess spiritual authority for God's church (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:5; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2), while deacons only have responsibility for the specific duties appointed to them by the elders (Acts 6:3).

As long as deacons' ministry is under the oversight and authority of the elders, Scripture does not limit the kinds of ministries that they may lead in a church. Deacons may assist elders upon appointment in all aspects of their leading and shepherding functions, including but not limited to teaching, modeling, praying, serving, counseling, administrating, etc. Philip was an evangelist (Acts 8:4-13, 26-40; 21:8-9). Stephen was a miracle-worker and a preacher of righteousness (Acts 6-7). Phoebe was a beloved helper of the church at Cenchreae (Romans 16:1-2).

Therefore deacons may assist elders in administrating certain ministry initiatives. Or they may be appointed to strengthen existing ministries. They may assist elders in counseling and caring for the needs of present members. Or they may work together to manage the financial business of the church according to the vision and priorities of the elders. Truly the work of a biblical deacon is not limited to custodial service and facilities! Since the biblical emphasis is on the spiritual maturity and exemplary character of the deacon, there is great biblical flexibility in how deacons practically employ their spiritual gifts to assist the elders in their shepherding responsibilities. Although deacons' primary function is not teaching, they are no less spiritually qualified, honored, or respected (1 Timothy 3:13). They relieve elders who are more skilled in teaching to be free to pray and study to teach.

The deacon ministry is essential for the church to fulfill her purpose for the glory of God. Truly the deacon's work is the essence of spiritual greatness: *"And Jesus called them to him and said to them, 'You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'"* Mark 10:42-45

### **How has the role of deacon changed at NCBC over time?**

The role of deacons at NCBC has changed significantly over time. In 1946 NCBC began to be governed by a church council. After 1958 the church minutes reference the church being led by a board of directors. Then in 1977, the constitution was changed in order for NCBC to be governed by a board of seven men called "deacons." In 2009, our church moved to a more biblically consistent terminology and structure – referring to our spiritual overseers as "elders" and transitioning the deacon office to more of a custodial/trustee position. In the past 10 years since instituting biblical eldership at NCBC, the deacon role has evolved from a very narrow focus that only assisted with benevolence, communion,

baptisms, and grounds to the full spectrum of deacon ministry that it is today under the elders' spiritual oversight.

### **How do elders and deacons work together at NCBC today?**

Today NCBC exercises spiritual leadership in plurality by teams. Each ministry leadership team is made up of both elders and deacons who serve together in plurality for the glory of God in a defined area of NCBC's ministry. They serve the ministry ACTION teams under their oversight by prioritizing prayerful dependence, doctrinal soundness, relational wholeness, and missional faithfulness throughout their ministries.

Ministry Leadership Teams are chaired by an active elder, and are empowered with full elder authority to make decisions and truly lead in their ministry areas, as long as they are communicating well with all the elders (via timely minutes, updates, etc.) Whenever a leadership team encounters a significant decision that merits discussion with all elders, the chair may request time at the next elder meeting for such purpose.

Deacons serve alongside elders on Ministry Leadership teams in a supportive and helpful role. Deacons are responsible to consider how the leadership direction will practically affect related ministries. Deacons should therefore engage fully in leadership discussion, while maintaining a final posture of submission to the elder's spiritual authority on the team.

Elders highly value deacons' practical knowledge and representation of specific ministries when making shepherding decisions. The deacons' participation in the Ministry Leadership Teams also facilitates communication of the Elder's vision and oversight to the Ministry ACTION teams under their leadership.

### **What are Action teams, and how do they fit in our organizational structure?**

A Ministry Action team consists of NCBC members who serve together in plurality to practically do the work of the ministry and accomplish the vision of their corresponding Ministry Leadership Team (Ministry Leadership Teams are made up of the elders and deacons working together to serve a particular area of ministry.) A Ministry Action Team reports regularly to its corresponding Ministry Leadership Team, and is submitted to its spiritual oversight. Whenever possible, deacons – not elders – should chair Ministry Action Teams. Most typically, Ministry Action Teams are made up of faithful church members who are actively serving in that area of the church's ministry.

### **What is the biblical perspective on church ministry staff leaders?**

Biblically speaking, the Scriptures present two categories of church leaders: elders and deacons. The Scriptures do not consider a category of spiritual leadership in the church (like our present ministry staff) who are not elders or deacons. It is this realization that has caused our elders to want to recognize all our ministry staff as either vocational

deacons (for our non-pastoral ministry staff) or vocational elders (for our pastors). We believe God's design for church leadership is best.

### **How does a deacon's authority differ from an elder's spiritual authority?**

Deacons serve as the elders' agents—leading ministries on behalf of, and in submission to, the elder team. This authority structure is hinted at in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3 where the deacons are mentioned after the elders. While the Scriptures clearly command church members to submit to elders (Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 5:5), no Scriptures command submission to deacons. In other words, deacons do not possess the same spiritual authority as elders.

Deacons do not possess the spiritual authority for governing and shepherding and teaching the entire church. This level of spiritual authority is reserved for male elders (1 Timothy 2:11-12; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35). Therefore all deacons (whether male or female) must exercise significant spiritual maturity to ensure that their ministry never exercises spiritual authority outside the elders' oversight.

### **Why do we believe elders are only to be male?**

1 Timothy 2:11-13 says this, *“Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve.”* 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 says, *“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.”*

Both of these Scriptures are in the context of the gathered assembly of the congregation. Therefore we understand the “teaching,” “speaking,” and “exercising authority” to be the work of spiritual shepherding, governance, or eldering. We believe these Scriptures clearly teach that elders must be male, according to God's creation design.

NOTE: We do not believe these Scriptures are teaching that women must be mute nor mousey in church. God's Spirit has clearly gifted women for significant ministry – even speaking and teaching ministries in the church (Romans 12:5-8; 1 Corinthians 11:5; 12:7-27; Ephesians 5:19; c.f. Acts 18:26; Romans 16:1-2, 7). The clear emphasis of the New Testament is that women are to minister and employ their spiritual gifts within the church while under submission to their spiritual shepherds (elders).

### **Why do deacons no longer serve as their own standing committee at NCBC?**

Deacons, by definition, are the elders' spiritually mature assistants. They have no spiritual authority except that which has been delegated to them by their elders.

Therefore deacons are not a separate governing body, which somehow balances the power of the elders, etc. Biblically speaking, the deacons are not a separate leadership group that is over the entire church. We desire for our leadership structure to best serve the interests of the biblical distinctions between elders and deacons, and reduce opportunities for misunderstandings or confusion that can occur when the deacons meet as a group separate from the elders they are individually laboring to assist.

### **Why have we removed significant ministry job descriptions from our constitution?**

This revision removes the brief job descriptions for the pastors, ministry staff, and support staff from the constitution. Past constitutions listed all kinds of positions and committees that are no longer relevant for NCBC's ministry today. We believe the church constitution is not the right place for job descriptions to be listed.

For example, we no longer have an executive pastor at NCBC. We do not believe it is biblically required for the senior pastor to serve as the chairman of the elders. (In fact, we believe it can be healthy for a lay elder to serve as the chairman of the elders.) Each staff member at NCBC has a very detailed, multi-page job description that the elders have prepared and approved based on what is most needed by our church at the time according to the Scripture's direction. Our staff does not look to the church constitution for their roles and responsibilities in our church. So while we will continue to have active pastors, ministry staff, and support staff at NCBC, we do not believe it is wise nor necessary to list their job descriptions in our church constitution.

### **Why have we removed most of the leadership offices from our constitution?**

While we are removing the mention of trustees, recording secretary, treasurer, and financial secretary from our constitution, this does not mean that we no longer engage in such practices. While we will no longer recognize trustees as a separate leadership group within NCBC, we will still benefit from a group of people serving as the custodians of our church property as an ACTION team under the spiritual oversight of our Stewardship Leadership team. Although we no longer legally recognize someone as a recording secretary, the elders will still take minutes and preserve church records. Our elders will still make sure that all our financial practices are responsible and accountable even though we don't formally recognize a treasurer in our constitution. We will still have a financial secretary who continues the management of donor accounts just as we've always done. (NOTE: Contrary to the expressed fears of some, removing the financial secretary from our constitution in no way changes how your donations will be handled in confidence within the church.)

These positions do not need to be listed in our constitution for us to benefit from them. Our desire is to right-size our constitution, and remove unnecessary requirements for specific positions or formal officers in our church that neither the Scripture nor the law requires.

## Why do we believe deacons may be male or female?

In the ESV 1 Timothy 3:11 reads, *Their wives likewise* ... Yet the NASB translates, *Women likewise*... The difference in translation is due to the fact that the original Greek word can convey both meanings. All good Bible translations use footnotes at this point – no matter how they translate the word – to let readers know that the original word can legitimately be translated as either women or wives. In other words the context must determine which meaning Paul intends when he used the word “*gyne*” in verse 11.

Everyone agrees that 1 Timothy 3:11 is speaking about women, indeed women of great spiritual maturity who have significant ministry within the church. If Paul meant wives, then he’s giving extra qualifications for deacon’s wives in verse 11. If Paul meant women, then he is giving specific qualifications for female deacons in verse 11.

While we would obviously respect those who disagree, we humbly believe the context leans towards women instead of wives, primarily because Paul made no mention of elders’ wives in vv. 1-7. It would seem unlikely and unnecessary for Paul to specifically address deacons’ wives when he didn’t address elders’ wives in verses 1-7.

Further, Paul’s repeated use of the word “likewise” as a structural marker seems to indicate another kind of leader category. The “likewise” in verse 11 refers back to the “likewise” in verse 8, which refers back to the “likewise” in verse 1. Since we know from 1 Timothy 2:12 that women cannot serve as elders, we should not expect to see women referenced in the list of elder characteristics in verses 1-7. Then after Paul discussed deacons in verses 8-10 without mentioning their wives, he uses another “likewise” to specifically address female deacons.

Finally we lean towards the interpretation of women vs. wives, since there is no pronoun “their” in original text. If Paul really was trying to refer to the deacon’s wives, grammatically he would have included the pronoun.

Admittedly it’s an interpretative judgment call. But for these 3 strong reasons, we believe it is best to understand Paul to be describing the necessary character qualities of female deacons.

Now of course there are objections to this interpretation that we need to address. First, doesn’t 1 Timothy 3:12 require deacons to be the husband of one wife? Doesn’t this same phrase which is back in verse 2 for elders require deacons to be men?

Literally this phrase is “one-woman man.” It’s a linguistic idiom for marital faithfulness or purity. It isn’t emphasizing the person’s gender any more than it is requiring an elder or deacon to be married, or not to remarry after the death of a spouse, or have children, etc. In other words, the point of this phrase in both verses 2 and 12 is not the gender of the person, but their purity and faithfulness to their marriage vows.

Perhaps the strongest objection we encounter is the argument from 1 Timothy 2:11-12 that clearly teaches that women are not permitted to teach or govern in the church. We

clearly affirm God's design for the church to be led by a plurality of biblically qualified men. We believe only men can be pastors or elders. But remember, the deacon office is a submissive leadership role by definition. Deacons don't have to be "apt to teach" or to "govern God's church" like elders are required to do in verses 2 and 5.

As long as we understand deacons to serve under the spiritual authority of biblical elders, 1 Timothy 3:11 does not violate the teachings of 1 Timothy 2:11-12 or 1 Corinthians 14:33-35. Nowhere does Scripture prohibit women from serving as deacons with their Spirit-given gifts under the spiritual authority of their elders.

Others may object based on the fact that the prototype deacons first introduced in Acts 6:3-5 were men. But of course Acts is descriptive at that point, and not prescriptive. And both Romans 16 and early church history seems to give evidence that female deacons were commonly recognized in the churches.

So with this understanding of 1 Timothy 3:11, where do we see women serving as deacons? First, and most clearly, Paul writes in Romans 16:1, *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant [it's the Greek word for deacon] of the church at Cenchræe, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.*

Many commentators agree that whenever the word *diakonos* is used directly with a specifically named church, it is best to understand it as the official office of deacon. So Phoebe was a deaconess. And the reality of female deacons like Phoebe is confirmed by the strong witness of early church history.

Although church history is not authoritative, the clear witness of the early church shows women being publicly ordained as deacons to perform many valuable functions within the church. The earliest mention of female deacons we've found was in 111 AD – during the same generation who lived with the apostles – where two deaconesses are recorded as being arrested for being Christians. Evidences of active female deacons is common in writings from the second, third, and fourth centuries. (See, *Deaconesses: A Historical Study* by Martimort for a very detailed study of all the historical evidence for female deacons throughout history.)

Admittedly many good and godly people disagree on whether 1 Timothy 3:11 is speaking of female deacons or deacon wives. All agree that in the context, this verse speaks of spiritually mature women who have significant spiritual influence in God's church. However the humble conclusion of our elders at this point in time is that female deacons is the best interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:11 for the aforementioned reasons.

### **What led the elders to propose that we recognize female deacons now?**

Our elders have committed significant priority to our biblical study of spiritual leadership in God's church over the last four years. Some of the fruit of that study has been shared with the church family through Pastor Kevin's preaching on Biblical elders in 2016 ([http://www.myncbc.org/church/download.php?filename=sermon\\_archive/2016/2016013](http://www.myncbc.org/church/download.php?filename=sermon_archive/2016/2016013))

1 What is a Biblical Elder?.mp3), Biblical deacons in 2017 (<https://vimeo.com/203711518>), and Female deacons in 2019 (<https://vimeo.com/315212677>). Some of the results of our elders' study has been clearer understanding of the biblical distinctions between elders and deacons, and a greater commitment towards spiritual leadership development for all future elders and deacons. Thanks Lord!

Further, as we've begun to benefit from our decentralized leadership structure, we've had to wrestle with the reality of where our ministry staff fits into God's design for biblical leadership in His church. We've come to realize that biblically speaking, the Scriptures would view our ministry staff as vocational deacons. (Again, there are not three categories for spiritual leadership in the Scripture: elders, deacons, and ministry staff. There are only two: elders and deacons.) Through our careful study and consideration of the Scriptures, the elders are united in our belief that our ministry staff have been serving as biblical deacons for some time, and that God's Word does not prohibit women from serving our elders in this way, and that God's design is always better than man's.

While we recognized that our public recognition of female deacons would be met with fears from some who come from different traditions, we do not want to shepherd God's church out of fear of man. We believe God's design for leadership in His church is always to be trusted, and so we are humbly proceeding with this proposal at this time.

### **What does this proposal practically change for the ministry of women at NCBC?**

This change to our constitution changes very little for the ministry of women at NCBC. Many women have already been serving in deacon-roles for many years at NCBC; we have just not publicly recognized them as such. This really is a change in title only.

While this constitution revision does not functionally change how we have been practicing ministry leadership within the church for the last 10+ years, it does change how we publicly recognize the church leaders we do have. We believe God's design is good, and worthy of our submission even when it goes against our fears or our traditions. Our elders believe it is always best to obey God and pursue His design for His church however we can.

We believe the public recognition of our spiritually-mature women who are faithfully serving our church in submission to our elders will honor God's design for biblical leadership in His church, give honor to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7), and more faithfully connect all who are serving with their spiritual shepherds who are overseeing their ministries. Recognizing all the deacons who are serving our church (regardless of gender) will ensure that all deacons are properly developed, trained, and overseen by our elders. We are excited for our female ministry leaders to join with our male ministry leaders in benefiting from the elders' intentional development training for deacons.

In other words, while we expect very little change in the practical ministry of women at NCBC from this constitution revision, we do pray that our faithful women in ministry will be better supported, equipped, and prayed for because of this change in our nomenclature.

### **What does NCBC believe regarding women serving as missionaries?**

We do not support women serving as elders – even if on a mission field. However we do believe the biblical role of deacon fits very well our understanding of women’s biblical roles in missions. In fact our Outreach Leadership Team has had recent discussions about this, and has talked directly with some of our global partner sisters to ensure that they are not exercising spiritual authority over men (as if in the role of an elder – even if not recognized as such by title).

### **Does the Scripture teach that all women are to categorically submit to all men?**

No, however this is a common misconception so we will try to explain this carefully.

1 Corinthians 11:3 teaches that *“...the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.”* Verse 8 continues Paul’s argument, *“For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.”* These verses state clearly that God has given the role of headship to men, as evidenced by His creation order. But does this mean that all women are to always submit to all men in God’s design? Or does this mean that a man should never submit to a woman at church, or in the home, or at work?

The main point of 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 in its context is that women must make it clear that they are under the authority of male headship when they pray and prophesy in church. (Culturally in Corinth this was communicated by women having long hair and wearing a head covering. The head covering communicated that a woman was married and already “taken,” similar to wedding rings do in our culture today. But of course more important than outward symbols are the heart attitudes of humility and submissiveness.) Therefore 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 does not teach that women are categorically inferior to men, nor that men should never submit to women. In fact verses 11-12 emphasize the interdependence between both genders: *“...In the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.”* Just as there is functional submission within the Trinity (John 3:17; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 15:28), so there is functional submission between male and female. 1 Corinthians 11 does not teach that women are inferior to men anymore than Christ is inferior to God. In fact in the church a woman accepting the formal title of deacon will be another way to publicly communicate the fact that her ministry is under the spiritual authority of her male elders.

Ephesians 5:22-24 command wives to submit to their husbands. Colossians 3:20 commands children to obey their parents, and Ephesians 6:5-8 command employees to

submit to their employers. 1 Peter 5:5 and Hebrews 13:17 command believers to submit to their elders. Romans 13:1 and 1 Peter 2:13-14 command citizens to submit to their governors and kings. But the Scriptures do not command all women to submit to all men at all times. The Scriptures command you to submit to the position of delegated-authority over you – regardless of gender. Nowhere do the Scriptures command church members to submit to deacons. Because deacons do not possess the same spiritual authority that elders do. Deacons are simply the spiritually mature servants who assist the elders in helping them serve the needs of the body.

All Christians are called to submit to one another, admonish one another, pray for one another, etc. etc. These are not gender-specific commands. Within the home, women are called to submit to their husbands. Within the church, deacons (and all members) -- regardless of gender -- are called to submit to their elders. Obviously in groups of any size, there is a necessity for organizational structure and submission. This is why men can submit to female bosses at work. But this is not a violation of biblical manhood or womanhood. 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 clearly prohibit women from serving as elders in the church – but they do not prohibit the possibility of men in mutual submission to women within the body (i.e. Ephesians 5:21).

In summary, we believe the Scriptures teach a male headship in the home and church. Wives ought to submit to their husbands. And the spiritual ministry of women in the church ought to always communicate their submissiveness to their male headship of their elders. We believe the public recognition of female deacons will help clarify the submissive role of women in significant ministry within our church in accordance with God's design.

### **How significant is disagreement over the issue of female deacons?**

Our elders want to emphasize that we believe different interpretations of 1 Timothy 3:11 are possible and biblically permissible. We respect anyone who comes to a different position than ours after studying the text. God has left some measure of mystery for all of us in this text, and we do not feel the need to resolve all the possible tension of this. In such cases, we wish to walk humbly, with integrity, and with conviction to continue to search God's Word together, always being careful to obey what is clear, and trusting God with what is not clear. To us, it is clear that there are only two leadership offices within the church – elders and deacons...not elders, deacons, and ministry staff. We see nothing that prohibits women from serving as deacons, according to our practice of the diaconate. In fact, we believe it is most likely that 1 Timothy 3:11 actually speaks to female deacons, but we certainly appreciate those who hold other positions.

We do not believe this is a first-order (Gospel, Trinity, etc.), or even second-order matter of doctrine (Male elders, etc.). The question of whether women can appropriately be recognized as deacons who serve under the spiritual authority of their elders is a debated issue among brethren who are very like-minded on first-order and second-

order matters. When the biblical understanding of elders and deacons is held – with all of their inherent distinctions – we believe our convictions regarding female deacons is very similar to people’s differing preferences regarding home-schooling vs. public vs. private schooling. Many use Scripture to strongly support their convictions; some can even become militant and divisive over their convictions. But that is very regrettable. For the matter of educational philosophy, just like the matter of female deacons, is just not something that God’s children should divide over. It’s very acceptable for people to have differing opinions, preferences, and convictions on the topic – to the extent that they are biblically informed. But we must always be careful to keep this matter in its proper doctrinal order of importance in the big picture. Our proposal in no way compromises God’s design for complementarian view of biblical manhood and womanhood.

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*Questions related to the authority of the congregation:*

### **What is the role of the congregation in God’s design of an elder-led church?**

Hebrews 13:17 teaches all church members to “*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*” 1 Timothy 5:17 encourages an attitude of honor, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 a posture of respect and love. 2 Thessalonians 3:1 urges members to pray for their church leaders, “*that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored.*”

It is the elders of the church, not the congregation, who are ultimately responsible to care for the church of God (Acts 20:28), and will someday give an account to Christ for the souls under their care (Hebrews 13:17). It is the plurality of elders who in their leadership together hold the keys of “binding and loosing” according to Matthew 16:19. Practically this means it is the elders’ responsibility (not the congregation’s) to determine who is qualified to be accepted as a member of the church, and who should be dismissed in cases of perpetual unrepentance (Matthew 18:15-20).

Elders are on the front-line of spiritual ministry and they are vulnerable to many attacks. In a culture that despises authority, church members must guard against any divisive attitudes of suspicion or entitlement, and believe the best about their elders’ character and decisions (1 Corinthians 13:7). The congregation can truly encourage her elders by laboring alongside them in teaching (Acts 5:38; Colossians 3:16-17), counseling (Romans 15:14), visitation (Acts 2:46; James 1:27); giving (1 Corinthians 9:6-14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18), and all the other “one-another” commands of the New Testament.

It can be helpful to remember that the church is not a democracy. The church is not to be led by power-hungry and self-serving leaders (1 Peter 5:2-3). Rather Christ’s church is a family of blood-bought Christ-followers living on mission together as partners in God’s gospel (Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 1:3-5).

Humble leaders invite participation and value input from the congregation at various points of significance in the life of the church – not because this is biblically required, but out of love, care, and sensitivity to listen to make sure they are shepherding the congregation well. Faithful members should not rely on the illusion of a vote alone to communicate concerns or disagreements with their leaders, but humbly communicate concerns and questions directly to their leaders whenever they arise.

### **What is the purpose of a church vote?**

During our early history NCBC subscribed to congregational rule, which meant that the church members would vote to choose between various issues or leaders. The authority for leading the church was truly in the hands of the congregation as communicated through voting. However, in 2009 NCBC transitioned to an elder-led church in order to more faithfully practice God’s design for elders who together possessed spiritual authority for shepherding the local church. Hebrews 13:17, Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-5, 1 Timothy 3:5, and Titus 1:7, 9 are just some of the Scriptures which clearly teach that the elders, not the congregation, together have spiritual authority for leading the local church.

Accordingly, in an elder-led church the congregation generally no longer votes between choices, i.e. select three new elders from a list of eight candidates, or vote between the following choices to determine the color of our carpet, etc. We believe God has designed for the elders, not the congregation, to be responsible to make wise decisions together that serve God’s greatest glory within our church.

So then a congregational vote in an elder-led church is simply a vote of confidence in the elders’ decision. The vote assures the elders that the congregation is still following in support of their leadership. Humble leaders invite participation and value input from the congregation at various points of significance in the life of the church – not because this is biblically required, but out of love, care, and sensitivity to listen to make sure they are shepherding the congregation well. Church votes invite healthy transparency and dialogue between the elders and the rest of the church family.

In brief, the purpose of a church vote is to express support and communicate the members’ trust in their spiritual leadership together for God’s glory in the matter at hand.

### **Is it wrong for me to vote “No” against the recommendation of my elders?**

No. You should definitely vote according to your biblically-informed conscience. Romans 14:5 says, “*each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.*” However, please help your elders by taking the time to share your concerns or ask questions if your conscience is requiring you to vote against their recommendations. Families communicate and seek to promote unity even throughout minor disagreements. The revisions proposed in this constitution update are not worth dividing over (Romans 14:20-24). As Romans 14:19 says, “*So let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.*”