

TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH

NAIROBI

**GUIDELINES FOR THE
LOCAL CHURCH**

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CONTENTS

- 1. Distinctive Features of a Truly Biblical Church**
- 2. Starting and Constituting a Local Church**
- 3. Membership in the Local Church**
- 4. Leadership in the Local Church**
- 5. Worship**
- 6. Prayer Meetings**
- 7. The Sacraments**
- 8. Church Business Meetings**
- 9. Church Administration**
- 10. Weddings**
- 11. Funerals**

1. DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF A TRULY BIBLICAL CHURCH

This *Handbook* is about the local church, so we must first understand what a church is according to the Bible.

(1) WHAT IS A 'CHURCH'?

- The word 'church' is never used for a building; the early Christians met in homes (Rm.16:5), or public places (Acts 2:46). Nor does it refer to a group of churches in a given area having one organization (like a modern denomination, e.g. Methodist Church in Kenya). When many local churches are referred to the plural 'churches' is used (e.g. Rm.16:16, 1 Cor.11:16, 2 Cor.8:1, Gal.1:2).
- 'Church' refers to people, not the place where they meet, nor the sort of organization they belong to. These people meet together as Christians to fulfil the purposes for which God called the church into being. Note how the word 'church' is used in 1 Corinthians to refer to the Christians in Corinth as they meet together (verses 4-5,12,19,23,28,35).
- Is a local church *any* group of people who meet together and who call themselves Christians? No! They must be Christians according to the definition of the Bible. When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians he addressed them as a "church of God" (1:2), and went on to describe them as "sanctified in Christ Jesus," "called to be saints", and those who "call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." A local church is made up of people who put all their trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation from their sin, who God has united to Jesus Christ, and who have therefore been called out of the world to belong to Christ in order to serve Him. Those who do not profess salvation in Christ, or who do not believe in Christ as the only divine Saviour, or who are not living a Christian life, are NOT members of the church of God.
- The word 'church' is used in two ways in the New Testament. First, it refers to a local church, a regular meeting of Christians in a particular local place, such as the town of Corinth. Second, it refers to all of God's people, at all times and in all places (called the 'universal' church), who will meet in heaven in the last day and then for ever (Eph.5:23-27, Heb.12:23).

(2) WHAT ARE THE MARKS OF A 'CHURCH'?

At the time of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th. century, a study of the Scriptures led our fore-fathers in the faith to recognize three specific marks of a true local church.

- *The centrality of the Bible.* Christ is the head of the church (Eph.5:23, Col.1:18) because He died for the church. He has supreme authority to command whatever He wishes, and His will for His church is only found in the Scriptures. Church tradition, decisions of Councils, and teachings of even the most godly of men, must be compared with the Scriptures, and followed only if they agree with the Scriptures. Preaching and teaching the contents of the Bible must take priority over every other activity in the church (as in Acts 2:42, see also 1 Tim.4:13). Singing, testimonies and prayer have their place in the church, but they are secondary to and controlled by the Scriptures. Where the will of Christ is not known, or is disregarded, there is no Biblical church.
- *The proper administration of the sacraments.* As opposed to the teaching of Roman Catholicism, there are only **two** sacraments that have been instituted by Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper (see pp.12-13). If these sacraments are not observed, or if others are added, or if they are given a meaning different from Christ has said, there is no Biblical church.
- *The administration of church discipline.* Those who are members of the church (see pp.6-7), and who have been proved to have sinned, must be excommunicated from the fellowship of the church (Matt.18:15-17, 1 Cor.5:1-5). Too often churches are only interested in numbers, or they want to protect the rich and powerful. If discipline of those members who have sinned is not practiced, there is no Biblical church.

Trinity Baptist Church is not a denomination. The goal of our evangelism is to establish such local churches as have been described above. Such churches are considered to be independent from the church that had the responsibility of planting and nurturing it, when it has its own membership, and a functioning eldership of at least two elders.

2. STARTING AND CONSTITUTING A LOCAL CHURCH

Often churches are begun by first constructing a building for worship, and even offering material incentives for people to come. This is to build a local church on a false foundation. All the churches, whose beginning is described in Acts, started through preaching the gospel. The following are the steps that should normally be followed in starting a local church under the registration of Trinity Baptist Church, and for this purpose a letter of authorization will be given from the local church that holds the registration. Each step should be followed only when the overseeing local church has been informed and agrees that the time is right. We normally require that anyone starting a church enroll in the theological training course in Nairobi.

1. Begin with Bible studies, open-air preaching, door-to-door evangelism, rather than with Sunday - worship services. The exception to this is if there are no other churches in the area that can be attended. If you begin with regular worship services then people will join you for all sorts of reasons. By beginning in other ways you will more easily find out who is really interested in the Word of God, and who is committed from the heart. For example, many have a tradition of going to church on a Sunday morning, and they might just as well do it at your new meeting; but to regularly attend a Bible study at some other time demands special commitment. Any preaching and evangelism should be with the aim of getting people to come to the regular Bible study, and must be both expository and evangelistic. The Bible study should always be based on a specific passage of the Bible, and preferably should go through a book of the Bible, such as John's Gospel, or should deal with basic gospel themes, such as sin, Christ's death, faith and repentance.

2. The next step is to start Sunday services. When there are committed people at the Bible study who want to begin a local church, study with them what the Bible says about a church (such as pp.2-3). When you do begin, make sure you start from the very first the way you intend to continue (see under Worship). The central activity must continue to be the preaching of the word of God. Preach the basics of the faith – the authority of the Scriptures, God's law and sin, the work

of Christ as Saviour, faith and repentance, the necessity of holiness. Preach from specific passages of Scripture, even a book of the Bible. Also start a Sunday School for outreach to children.

3. The final step is to constitute the local church. This means that there are those who are true Christians, who recognize each other to be such, and who want to formally join together as a church, promising to be faithful to God and each other. It may take months or even years before this point is reached. To prepare the believers for this the following things should be done:

- Go through all the Bible studies on “Distinctive Doctrines.”
- Study the Trinity Baptist Church constitution.
- Get the elders of the overseeing local church, and any other elders they think fit, to interview for membership all who desire to be members of the new church.

When this has been completed to the satisfaction of the overseeing local church, then a date should be fixed for the service of constituting. This service must be presided over by the overseeing elders, and it is good fellowship if representatives of other local churches are also present. It will include a solemn covenanting together of all the members, either by repeating or signing a written statement, or both, in which each member promises to carry out the responsibilities of church membership as outlined in the constitution (section 5.3).

The local church is now formally established, but will not be fully independent until there is a functioning eldership of at least two elders (see pp.8-9). Until this time the elders of the overseeing church will function as the eldership of the church, together with any elder, if there is one. This means that no new members can be admitted, no leaders appointed, and no congregational meetings held, without the approval of these elders.

3. MEMBERSHIP OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

We believe it is right to have a membership in the local church. We need to know who is and who is not a member. The apostolic church knew how many had been baptized and became part of the local church (Acts 2:41,47, 4:4). Unless the members are known how can an unrepentant person be disciplined and excommunicated from the church?

The Trinity Baptist Church constitution deals with the issue of membership in section 5.

(1) *Who can become a church member?*

On the Day of Pentecost about 3,000 were added to the 120 disciples (Acts 1:15). Two things were true about those who became members of the first church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41):

- They received the word Peter had spoken about repentance (2:38), and being saved from this crooked generation (2:40). They repented of their sins, specifically of having crucified Jesus, because they now believed He is Lord and Christ (2:36). One who is to become a church member must therefore have a testimony of repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ.
- They were baptized after having received the word. Baptism always and only takes place **after** a person has become a true Christian (Acts 8:12,36, 9:18, 10:47-48, 16:15,33, 18:8, 19:5). There is no clear example of babies being baptized, even in the case of household baptisms. Going through a ceremony called 'baptism' before becoming a true Christian is not Biblical baptism, and such a person must be baptized as a believer. Baptism is by immersion in water (Rm.6:3-4). Allowance may be given for a person who was baptized as a believer, but not by immersion. Otherwise, no one can become a church member unless baptized as a believer (child or adult).

(2) *How does a person become a member?*

- A person who wants to become a member must speak to one of the church elders. Unless the elder is sure the applicant is not eligible, a copy of the church constitution and an application form is given. If the applicant is illiterate, or cannot read the language in which the constitution is written, a responsible person who is literate must be given the task of explaining what is written and filling in the application form.
- When the application form is submitted, at least two of the elders should sit down with the applicant to discuss the testimony and to inquire about his commitment. The 10 responsibilities of church membership (constitution, section 5.3) should be gone through in detail. This is also an opportunity for the applicant to ask any questions about the constitution or the church. No application for membership should be recommended to the church unless the elders are satisfied that the person is a true Christian and fully committed to the teaching and life of the local church (elders can get help on this interview from a paper with written guidelines).
- At least two weeks' notice should be given to the church that the applicant(s) have been recommended by the elders. At a subsequent meeting of the whole church, the applicant should present his testimony, relevant questions may be directed at him, and a vote taken to receive the person into church membership. Before the formal vote, it is good to excuse the applicant for private discussion with members. This is both an opportunity for those who know the applicant well to speak from their personal knowledge, and for any who might have questions which would not be wise for the applicant to hear. Minutes must be made of all church meetings called for approval of new members.
- Those who are approved at the church meeting should be baptized and brought into membership at the next celebration of the Lord's Supper, with every member welcoming him/them with a "holy kiss."

4. LEADERSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

(1) *Leaders in the New Testament*

The New Testament church only knows of the following types of leadership – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Eph.4:11). It knows nothing about a pope, cardinal, a bishop over many churches, priest, archdeacon, etc. It is not possible that any one today can fulfil the qualifications for an apostle (see Acts 1:21-22). The Bible does not give us the qualifications for a prophet or an evangelist, and we assume that these offices have been withdrawn together with the apostles, having served their purpose in the apostolic church. We are given the qualifications for the pastor-teacher in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. This pastor is also called ‘bishop’ or ‘elder’ (Acts 14:23, Phil.1:1, 1 Tim.3:1, 5:17, Tit.1:5,7, Jas.5:14). The word ‘minister’ means servant and applies to anyone doing a work of service. No leader should take the title ‘reverend,’ as it is not Biblical and should be reserved for God. Note that when Paul talks to the ‘elders’ of the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:17), he also calls them ‘bishops’ (or overseers), and commands them to “care” for the church (literally, ‘to do the work of a pastor’) (verse 28).. So Peter also addresses the ‘elders’ (1 Pet.5:1), commanding them to ‘tend’ the flock as pastors, and have ‘oversight’ as bishops (verse 2). Therefore, the only leaders with authority in the church today are such elders of the local church, and this is one very powerful argument for the independency of each local church.

Note: There is also the office of deacon in the local church (Acts 6:1-6, Phil.1:1, 1 Tim.3:8-13). Deacons are helpers of the elders, but they have no authority to rule, and no responsibility to teach and preach.

(2) *Appointment of leaders in the local church*

- It is only after a church has officially been constituted with a membership that leaders can be chosen from amongst the members. It is Christ, the head of the church, who gives gifts to His church (Eph.4:11). The church cannot make elders by appointing them; the church can only recognize the qualifications in a man that the Lord has given.

- The existing elders are the ones who should put forward the names of any they believe are qualified (Acts 14:23, Tit. 1:5). This should only be done after teaching has been given about eldership in the church. No elder should ever be appointed in a local church without the acceptance by voting of the members of that local church. It is the responsibility of the members to examine the nominee and find out if he fulfils the Biblical qualifications. If he does, then he should become an elder of that local church.
- The proposed elder should then be set apart or recognized as an elder in the presence of the whole church, with the laying on of hands of the existing elders, or overseeing elders (1 Tim.4:14). It may be accompanied by prayer and fasting (Acts 14:23), and elders from other churches may also be invited to take part, as a sign of fellowship between local churches. We prefer not to use the word ‘ordain,’ as it is God who does the ordaining.

(3) Women and leadership in the local church

There is no example of an apostle or elder in the New Testament who was a woman. It is clearly written, “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men” (1 Tim.2:12). Women cannot lead the church as elders. They may possibly be deacons, if Romans 16:1 and 1 Timothy 3:11 are interpreted to refer to the office. Nevertheless, women have a vital role to play in the church: with their children at home (1 Tim.5:10), and all the children in the church; supporting and encouraging their husbands; and the older women training the younger (Tit.2:3-6).

(4) Dangers of leadership

Under Christ and His word, all authority in the local church is in the elders (1 Tim.3:4-5, 5:17). They are to be obeyed (Heb.13:17). Thus there is the great danger that an elder becomes authoritarian, “domineering” (1 Pet.5:3), like the Gentiles (Mk.10:42-45). However, elders are to lead by setting an example of humble service to the church. Because the danger of authoritarianism is greater if there is just one elder, at least two should be recognized at the beginning. A plurality of elders is the Biblical pattern (Acts 14:23, Tit.1:5). Any elder who does not rule and teach according to the word of God should be removed by a vote of the local church.

5. WORSHIP

(1) *What is worship?*

Worship is the highest privilege of the church as it meets together. As the word worship implies, it is to ascribe ‘worth’ to God, to exalt His name in praise and thanksgiving. There are many examples of this in the Psalms, such as Psalms 146-150. We do not come together to be entertained by the preacher or choirs; our aim is not to feel good and have all our problems solved. Above all else God must be glorified – this is our privilege and responsibility.

(2) *How should Christians worship God?*

We cannot choose how to worship God; we must not just follow our culture or tradition. We are not worthy to come into His presence. It is only because He has made it possible through Christ (Heb.10:19-22). We examine the Bible to know how to worship.

- In “spirit and truth” (Jn.4:23-24). The physical place does not matter (verse 21). What is important is the attitude of our hearts (see Matt.15:8-9), and that we worship God according to the truth He has revealed in the Scriptures.
- With “reverence and awe” (Heb.12:29), because God is a consuming fire (verse 30). God is not like a brother with whom we can chat and have a good time. He is the thrice holy God before whom we can only cover our faces because of His glory and our shame (Is.6:1-5). There is far too much light-heartedness in worship today. Abounding joy we must have because of the salvation He has given us, but it must always be reverential joy (see Ps.96:1-6).
- Unto “edification” (1 Cor.14:3,5,12,26). Nothing should be done in worship that does not build up the whole church. This is why uninterpreted tongues were unacceptable in Corinth (1 Cor.14:27-28).

(3) *How should a service of worship be organized?*

- Sunday is the Lord’s Day, the Christian sabbath. The whole of it should be devoted to the Lord in worship, fellowship and service. It is good to organize more than one service for each Sunday.

- The following elements of worship are found in the Bible: reading the Scriptures and preaching/teaching (1 Tim.4:13), prayer (1 Tim.2:1-2,8), singing (1 Cor.14:26). The following elements should be in any service of worship, and should be well planned beforehand:

Prayer – Because we totally depend upon God the service should open and close in prayer asking for God’s blessing. There should be a time given to prayer in which there is praise, thanksgiving, confession, and petition. Excessive length should be avoided as well as repetition of phrases referring to God. The leaders, and anyone else who is gifted in public prayer, should pray on behalf of the whole church. The practice of ‘worship,’ when everyone prays their own prayer out loud at the same time, is not Biblical and must not be practiced. It does not edify others.

Singing – We are not singing to enjoy ourselves, although we should sing with all that is within us (Ps.33:1-3). As in prayer, there should be a variety of songs, expressing praise, thanksgiving, confession, and petition. Be very careful of choruses that have very weak content and are just repetitious. What we sing must express the truth of Scripture. Do not let young or immature people take over the singing. What is to be sung must be planned ahead of time like everything else. Choirs are not recommended – they easily turn worship into entertainment. If there is a choir, its members must only be church members, and what they sing must be approved by the elders beforehand.

Reading the scripture – A portion of Scripture should be read apart from the passage that is to be preached. It should be a chapter, but no longer than about 30 verses. Read consecutively through a book of the Bible, taking just a few minutes to explain the main message of the passage..

Preaching – This is the main work of the elders, especially such who “labour in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim.5:17). If others are invited to preach it must only be those who are known to be gifted. The normal method of preaching should be consecutive-expository as you work your way through a book of the Bible. Preaching must be given priority of time.

Announcements – These should be as few as possible, and only those relevant to the whole church and must not take away from the worship. This is not a time to conduct church business.

6. PRAYER MEETINGS

All members should not only pray in their homes privately and as families, but together with other church members. This is the clear example of the local church (Acts 2:42, 3:1, 4:23-31, 12:5,12, 1 Tim.2:8). There were both organized times of prayer, and special times of prayer. The church is completely dependent upon the Lord, and the church that does not pray cannot expect any blessing .

Every local church should have at least one time of organized prayer in the week. The specific day, time and length will depend on the decision of each local church.

Here is a suggested form for a church prayer meeting:

- The leader prays for God's blessing on the meeting.
- Singing (optional).
- Reading and explaining a passage of Scripture. This should take no longer than 10-15 minutes as the purpose of the meeting is to pray. For example, the Lord's Prayer, prayers of Paul in his letters, Old Testament prayers, Psalms may be explained.
- Sharing of requests for prayer. These should include regular church activities and especially the preaching of the word, personal requests for holiness and witness (the prayer meeting must not become a list of health and material needs), the needs of the country (1 Tim.2:1-3), other churches in Kenya, unevangelized areas, other countries. We must not be self-centred in our praying.
- Prayer session. Should include praise to God, thanksgiving for His mercies, prayer based on Scripture passage, confession, and prayer for the requests shared. If the group is large you may decide to break off into smaller groups, as everyone ought to be encouraged to pray. Men are commanded to pray (1 Tim.2:8); women may pray if they have waited for the men to pray. Women and men may pray separately. No one should pray long prayers, and all should be encouraged to pray to be heard by others, perhaps standing,.
- The leader closes in prayer at the stated time, unless there is special blessing from God.

7. THE SACRAMENTS

The sacraments are those religious ceremonies Christ has instituted that are symbols of the gospel. Christ has given us only two – Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

They are not more important or powerful than the word; they are the word in symbol form. It is like in nursery school when the teacher will not just talk about an animal like an elephant but will talk from a picture. So anyone who is fit to teach the word is also fit to administer the sacraments. Note that it was not Peter who baptized the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:48). Paul only baptized two believers in Corinth (1 Cor.1:14). If we say that only ‘ordained’ pastors can administer the sacraments, people will think they are so special, even magical.

The sacraments are a great blessing, one means through which we receive grace from God. Note that such grace is not received automatically; we must first understand the meaning of the symbols, exercise faith just as we do when we hear the word; only in this way will we be blessed.

The two sacraments are for the local church alone, except under very special circumstances. Baptism is the formal way of entry into the local church (Acts 2:41-42). The Lord’s Supper was celebrated in local churches, Jerusalem (Acts 2:42), Troas (Acts 20:7), Corinth (1 Cor.11:17-34).

(1) *Baptism*

- Baptism is a symbol of becoming a Christian, so it is only to be administered once, *after* a person has professed faith. Any baptism before true conversion is not baptism according to the Bible (see under Membership, p.6). The water is a symbol of cleansing from sin through the blood of Christ (Acts 22:16). The action of being dipped under the water is a symbol of dying and rising with Christ (Rm.6:3-4). Baptism is the assurance from God Himself that the one being baptized has been washed from sin, has died to sin and risen to a new life in Christ, and through Christ is now in living union with the triune God (Matt.28:19). To be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38, 10:48, see 1 Cor.1:12-15) probably means

baptism is what Christ commanded so that He is the one to whom you belong. The trinitarian statement is what is to be used in baptism.

- After a person has been approved by the church for membership through baptism, one of the elders should give instruction on the meaning of baptism. Above all it must be emphasized that we submit to being baptized because Christ has commanded it. There is no reason to delay baptism – as soon as a person requests it the process should start by talking with the elders. Make sure the candidate is instructed to carry a towel and a change of clothes; appoint a brother or sister to be with them to help them on the day.
- Baptisms may be performed during a service, or at a separate time. It does not even have to be on a Sunday. Here is a suggested order to be followed:

Prayer for God's blessing.

Testimony of the candidate.

Hymn about baptism.

Baptism - The one baptizing should lower the candidate slowly into the water until he is completely covered, holding the head with one hand, and the hands with the other. Say, "Because you have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," as you put the candidate under the water.

Hymn immediately baptism is concluded, or between baptisms; exhortation to believe and be baptized.

Prayer for the candidate(s) and witnesses .

- It is good that the baptism be performed the same day as the Lord's Supper, so that the one(s) baptized can be welcomed as church members with the right hand of fellowship at that time.

(2) *Lord's Supper*

- It is called the Lord's Supper (1 Cor.11:21), the Lord's Table (1 Cor.10:21), Communion = fellowship (1 Cor.10:16), the Eucharist = thanksgiving (from 1 Cor.11:24), and breaking of bread (Acts 2:42, 20:7). It is **not** a sacrifice, as is claimed in the Catholic Mass, but a *remembrance* of the death of Christ (1 Cor.11:24-25). The elements do not change, for they are symbols of Christ's body and blood. We eat and drink the elements so that they become part of our body, as a

symbol that we depend upon Christ and Him crucified for our spiritual life (see Jn.6:53-54).

- The Lord's Supper should be celebrated frequently, at least once a month. It is for the members of the local church, and baptized members of other churches who are visiting. It is best observed as a special (separate) service, and it does not have to be a Sunday. A quiet place should be chosen and, if there are children present, they should be taken care of so that they do not disturb. If possible the participants sit around a table. Here is a suggested order of service:

Early arrival and quiet meditation by members.

Prayer for God's blessing.

Hymn about Lord's Supper, death of Christ.

Explanation of the Scriptures having to do with the Lord's Supper, or more generally Christ's death, for example, Rm.5:8, 2 Cor.5:21, Phil.2:5-8, Heb.10:11-14, 1 Pet.2:24. From time to time the institution and meaning of the Lord's Supper should be explained, as well as the duty of self-examination (1 Cor.11:27-32).

Reading the institution of the Lord's Supper in Matt.26:26-29, Mk.14:22-25, Lk.22:14-20, or 1 Cor.11:23-26.

Prayer of thanksgiving for the bread, representing the broken body of Christ on the cross. The leader may choose another brother gifted in public prayer to pray.

Distribution of the bread, either by designated individuals, or from person to person. When everyone has received the leader says, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me," and everyone eats together. While it is being distributed participants should be encouraged to silently meditate and pray.

Prayer of thanksgiving for the cup, representing the blood of Christ which established the new covenant.

Distribution of the cups after which the leader says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me," and everyone drinks together. While the cups are being distributed a hymn about the blood of Christ may be sung.

Hymn of rejoicing in Christ and the blessings in Him.

Prayer committing the church to the Lord.

- The elements Jesus used in the Last Supper were commonly found at meals. So use unleavened bread (chapati), and diluted red juice (ribena or quencher).

8. CHURCH BUSINESS MEETINGS

Read the Trinity Baptist Church constitution, section 8.

Elders rule the church (1 Tim.5:17) and they are responsible to make sure that all decisions are according to the Scriptures. The church is not ruled democratically, that is, the decision of the majority is what is done. Christ is the head of each local church, and it is His will alone that must be carried out.

Nevertheless, the elders are not the church. The church is made up of *all* the members of the local church, who are equal before God. All members have spiritual gifts. Anyone ought to have the opportunity to express an opinion in order to contribute to the life of the church.

So at church business meetings all members are expected to be present. It is an opportunity for the elders to explain things to the church, without non-members being present, such as the recommendation of new church members, or the discipline of errant members; and the appointment of church officers; church finances, etc. It is not an opportunity to debate doctrines and practices that are clearly revealed in the Bible – here the elders have the responsibility to teach with authority. Where decisions have to be taken, the elders should always bring the matter to the church in the form of a recommendation.

There are three types of church meeting referred to in the constitution:

- Ordinary, at least three times a year, where issues affecting the running of the church should be discussed – leadership, membership, finance, and any decisions the elders believe need the approval of the whole church.
- Annual General Meeting, at which the past life of the church should be considered, perhaps in terms of the 4 activities of Acts 2:42.
- Extraordinary, when there is a crisis that cannot be delayed until a normal meeting – for example, church discipline, or leadership.

The chairman of all church meetings should be one of the elders. His responsibility is not to impose, but to guide discussion of all items on the agenda, giving fair opportunities to all who wish to contribute, and not letting any one individual dominate. If it is clear that there is no unity, the recommendation should either be withdrawn, or the vote postponed until more discussion has taken place. Unity is always to be striven for.

The venue, time and agenda must be made known to all members at least two weeks before the meeting is scheduled to take place (see constitution). The agenda will look something like this:

1. Opening prayer.
2. Exhortation from the Scriptures relevant to the meeting.
3. Approval of the minutes of the previous church meeting.
4. Matters arising from the previous church meeting minutes.
5. (various specific items for which the meeting was called)
(last number) Any other business.

Accurate minutes of all such meetings should be kept by the secretary. Such minutes should not give details of all the things spoken in the meeting, otherwise they are too long. Rather, the minutes must contain:

- A list of all church members, whether present, absent with apology or absent without apology.
- A statement that the minutes of the previous meeting were approved, with the details of any changes to those minutes that needed to be made. Note: During the meeting these minutes should be signed by the elder who is the chairman, and the deacon who is the secretary.
- Under separate reference numbers, each decision that was made, with the voting, i.e. whether unanimous, or how many for and against. The wording should be as the elders made the recommendation in the agenda, or however the words were amended in the meeting.
- The outcome of any other discussions that took place.

The church must have a certified copy of all decisions it has made. Sadly, this is essential in the case of any future disputes.

9. CHURCH ADMINISTRATION

(1) *Elders & Deacons*

- Each local church should be administered by elders and deacons. Elders have full authority from Christ the head of the church to rule the church according to the Scriptures, by preaching, teaching, counselling and prayer. Deacons are best seen as helpers of the elders, taking from them the day to day ministry to the needy (Acts 6:1-6), caring for any church facilities, and finance. They have no spiritual authority in the church and must work very closely with the elders.
- The elders should meet together regularly for discussion and prayer, if possible weekly. At such meetings, all aspects of the life of the church should come under review - preaching, fellowship, evangelism, deacons, all members individually, general health of the church, plans for the future, etc. Minutes of all decisions made should be kept and signed as accurate by the elders. It is important to keep an Elders' file.
- The deacons should also meet regularly for discussion, if possible monthly. At least twice a year elders and deacons should meet together. At such meetings, all aspects of the diaconal responsibility should come under review – needy people in the church, both due to sickness and poverty; care and development of any church property; all aspects of church finances, such as giving out money, bank and records. Individual deacons may be given specific responsibilities, e.g. finances. Once again, minutes of all decisions should be kept and signed as accurate by the deacons. It is important to keep a Deacons' file.
- The church is not to be run through numerous committees made up of various members. There may be exceptional cases where a committee is formed including members who are not elders or deacons. For example, when a church building is being planned there may be certain members with a specific expertise; the Sunday School and youth work. But an elder must always be the chairman of any such committee, and has the right to veto any decision. The rule of the elders in the local church must never be compromised.

(2) Church Finances

The finances that the church has are specially the Lord's, as they are the free-will offerings of His people. Great care must be taken that all income and expenditure is properly recorded.

- All income should be recorded in a book. The Sunday offerings should be counted by at least two members, one of them being a deacon, and their signatures added to the total amount received.
- Each expenditure should be recorded on a petty cash voucher, the relevant details filled in, with the signature both of the recipient and the person giving the money. If that person is not normally authorized by the church to give out money, then the signature of the person authorizing must also be there.
- A separate book should record all expenditure on the left, and all income on the right, month by month. At any given time the final amount in the most right hand column ought to agree with the cash balance available. This account must be kept up to date at least monthly.
- If the church opens a bank account it is good to have expert advice on how the finance books ought to be kept.

(3) Church Records

- Receipts, correspondence and other papers need to be organized into files. For example, you will need files for Elders, Deacons and Finances. You might also want the following: Membership (including application forms), Association, Other Churches.
- When correspondence arrives, it is good to write on it the date received, and then the date when it was replied to. Make a copy of all official correspondence for your records.
- Records also need to be kept of any items that belong to the church, such as hymn books, library books.

10. WEDDINGS

Marriage is a creation ordinance, that is, it was ordained by God at creation, before the fall of man in to sin (Gen.2:24). It is therefore good for all men. The Kenya Government grants licenses to Pastors through application by the church that is registered. Such Pastors therefore may be fully authorized to perform weddings.

(1) *Whose weddings should be performed?*

- Members of the local church
- Members of other churches, so long as both profess salvation and the church sends a recommendation.
- Neither profess salvation, so long as you are satisfied as to the reason why they want to be married in a Christian way and not before the secular authorities. In this case the ceremony will be performed assuming they are not true Christians.
- Couples who want a Christian wedding, but who have been married under customary law. According to their spiritual status, they will be dealt with as above.
- Couples who have been living together without any form of marriage will only be wedded if they agree that this is sin, and a public statement be made by them or the officiating pastor to that effect, and the bride does not wear anything that speaks of purity, i.e. white dress, veil.
- A divorced person will only be remarried if the divorce was for reason of adultery (Matt.5:32), or the unbeliever leaving a believer (1 Cor.7:15).
- Under **no** circumstances will a wedding be performed if only one of the partners professes salvation (1 Cor.7:39, 2 Cor.6:14); if one or both partners has been unbiblically divorced; if one or both are already married traditionally or by religious ceremony to another who is still living; if they have been living together and refuse to confess publicly; or if one of the partners is tested HIV+.

Except for weddings between church members, all other categories of weddings may be accepted or refused at the discretion of the elders.

(2) Pre-Martial Counselling

When the elders are approached by a couple for marriage, a series of counselling sessions must be planned.

- If one or both are not members of your local church, then first make sure the one(s) not members are true Christians. Do this with care as many, especially men, pretend to be 'saved' in order to marry a saved lady. You must contact the church he/she comes from, and make any other inquiries you think necessary.
- Make sure they are eligible to be married (see under 1). Both should take an AIDS test and if one is positive you should refuse the wedding. If you are in any doubt you have no obligation to marry them. Note: It is proper to marry non-Christians as marriage is a creation ordinance, so long as the ceremony does not assume they are Christians!
- If at this point you agree to go ahead, then arrange for 2 or more counselling sessions where you will teach and discuss with them about marriage according to the Bible. You will deal with such passages as Gen.2:18-24, Prov.31:10-31, Eph.5:22-33, Col.3:18-19, 1 Tim.5:10, Tit.2:4-5. You will obviously want to emphasize the purpose of marriage as companionship and not just procreation; the responsibility of the man to love his wife as Christ loved the church and what it means to be the head of the home, and of the women to submit to her husband in everything. You must discuss matters of family planning, the possibility of being childless, and the problems that may come from parents, in-laws and extended family.
- You may, at any point during these counselling sessions, postpone the wedding, or refuse to conduct it as a church.
- After the wedding make visits to the newly married couple during the first year to see how things are working out.

(3) The Wedding Ceremony

As far as possible this should be organized according to the wishes of the couple, as it is 'their' day. Try to anticipate any unbiblical traditional practices. Make sure the couple do not go into debt over the wedding. The Nairobi Church can give you a suggested programme for the wedding service. Above all, make it an opportunity to preach the gospel.

11. FUNERALS

No local church can escape the reality of death amongst its own members, or in the wider community. It is obviously a godly thing to do to visit any bereaved family in order to express condolences and to see what help the church might be able to give. But should a church be willing to conduct a funeral service for anyone in the community? Yes, as it is an opportunity to bring the word of God.

(1) THE FUNERAL SERVICE

- Discuss with the organizers of the service who represent the family. Because funerals are times when many unbiblical and traditional practices enter in, be sure you are clear on what is and is not allowed in your local church. You must be in complete control.
- If the deceased was a true Christian, then the funeral should have an element of joy. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Ps.116:15). As well as giving comfort by the assurance of entering glory (1 Thess.4:13-18), thanksgiving to God should be given for the deceased’s life on earth.
- If the deceased was not a true Christian, nothing should be said about him/her, and certainly no prayers should be offered for him/her. Comfort should not be given as if the person was a Christian. It is an opportunity to tell the mourners about the sad reality of death, that at death the soul immediately goes to heaven or hell, and that we should all prepare before death comes upon us unexpectedly. The purpose is to speak to living, and not to or about the dead.
- Where should the coffin be placed? Because many put such an emphasis that it ought to be at the front of the church building, it is better not to place it there, but at the side or even outside. Let the pulpit and the word of God be central.
- The following is a suggested order of service, assuming the deceased was a Christian:
 - PRAYER for God’s blessing on the service.
 - SCRIPTURE READING of such passages as 1 Cor.15:51-58, 1 Thess.4:13-18, an account of Christ’s resurrection.
 - SINGING of a favourite song of the deceased and one that refers to triumph in death and glory.

EULOGY (means to bless God). One of the elders, or a mature Christian in the church, may talk about the conversion and Christian life of the deceased. Details that glorify God may be brought out, such as the gifts God gave for the church, how grace was given in view of approaching death. In the case of a non-Christian, no such eulogy should be given, except skeleton details of the person's life at most. If you are not careful this is where relatives and friends start to give assurance that the deceased is in heaven, etc.

PRAYER for the bereaved family to be comforted by the gospel, and for all the mourners; for the preaching.

SERMON should be directed towards the mourners as a whole, and should be evangelistic in emphasis. Take the great gospel themes such as Jn.3:16, 11:25-26. Warn people about death from Ecc.7:2-4, Lk.16:19-31. Aim for the salvation of the hearers as this may be the only time they sit and listen to the preaching of the gospel.

PRAYER for blessing on the word preached.

VIEWING of the body outside (if desired).

(2) AT THE GRAVESIDE

It is probably better not to officiate at the graveside for one you do not think was a true Christian. Once again, you ought to have discussed this with those in charge and made it very clear what is to be done, and what is not to be done. The purpose of anything done at the graveside is simply to commit the body into the grave. It must not be surrounded with ceremonies that imply anything of religious significance, such as the pastor throwing the first soil onto the coffin. Let there be singing of Christian hymns around the grave. Exhort those assembled of the hope of the resurrection of the dead, that one day all who are in their tombs will hear the voice of Christ (Jn.5:28-29). Pray for all who are God's people to rejoice in the certainty of going to be with the Lord after death (Phil.1:23) and of resurrection from death on the last day. Commit the coffin to the grave without any religious ceremony. It is fitting for the family to be the first to cover the coffin with soil. Finish with prayer for the bereaved as they return to their homes.