

CONSTITUTION
OF THE
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF LOWELL
LOWELL, MICHIGAN

August 1998

MISSION STATEMENT

We endeavor to..

MAGNIFY

The Lord by bringing people to Jesus Christ and

MEMBERSHIP

in His family seeking to develop them to Christ-like

MATURITY

equipping them for their

MINISTRY

in the Church..and their life

MISSION

in the world!

THE PREAMBLE

Reposing our faith wholly in the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation, and believing in the teachings of the Holy Bible as the plenarily (complete, absolute, full) and verbally (word for word...every word) inspired Word of the living God, we have affiliated ourselves with one another as a body of immersed believers, and we adopt this constitution as a declaration of our convictions.

Our purpose is to glorify God by conducting a Baptist church in accordance with the Word of God, the articles of faith, the covenant and the constitution of this local church, promoting the worship of God, edifying believers, teaching the whole counsel of God, administering the ordinances and Biblical discipline, seeking to win the lost to Christ through personal witnessing and the preaching of the gospel, carrying on a vigorous missionary program around the world, establishing other Baptist churches, defending the faith, and maintaining a good testimony for Christ in our community by godliness and good works.

CONSTITUTION OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF LOWELL

The Bible admonishes us saying, "Let all things be done decently and in order." To this end do we members of the First Baptist Church of Lowell, Kent County, Michigan execute and adopt the following Articles of Association.

ARTICLE I

NAME

The name declared by this corporation and by which it shall be called in laws is the First Baptist Church of Lowell, Michigan.

ARTICLE II

CONFESSION OF FAITH

We accept the confession of faith of the Grand Rapids Association of Regular Baptist Churches, as clarified at the June 1975 and 1976 annual meetings.

Of the Scriptures

We believe in the authority and sufficiency of the Holy Bible, consisting of the sixty-six books of the old and new testaments, as originally written; that it was verbally and plenarily inspired and is the product of Spirit-controlled men, and therefore is infallible and inerrant in all matters of which it speaks.

We believe the Bible to be the true center of Christian unity and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creed, and opinions shall be tried (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).

The True God

We believe there is one and only one living and true God, an infinite Spirit, the Maker and supreme Ruler of Heaven and earth; inexpressibly glorious in holiness, and worthy of all possible honor, confidence and love; that in the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, equal in every divine perfection and executing distinct but harmonious offices in the great work of redemption (Exod. 20:2,3; I Cor. 8:6; Rev. 4:11).

The Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, equal with God the Father and God the Son and of the same nature; that He was active in the creation; that in His relation to the unbelieving world He restrains the evil one until God's purpose is fulfilled; that He convicts of sin, of righteousness and of judgment; that He bears witness to the truth of the gospel in preaching and testimony; that He is the Agent in the new birth; that He seals, endues, guides, teaches, witnesses, sanctifies and helps the believer. We believe the sign/revelatory gifts of the Holy Spirit fulfilled their purpose at that time (during the Apostolic Age) and are not normative today. (John 14:16; Matt. 28:19; Heb. 9:14; John 14:26; Luke 1:35; Gen. 1:1-3; John 16:8-11; Acts 5:30-32; John 3:5,6; Eph.1:13,14; Mark 1:8; John 1:33; Acts 11:16; Luke 24:49; Rom. 8:14, 16, 26, 27).

The Devil or Satan

We believe in the reality and personality of Satan, the Devil; and that he was created by God as an angel but through pride and rebellion became the enemy of his creator; that he became the unholy god of this age and the ruler of all the powers of darkness and is destined to the judgment of an eternal justice in the lake of fire (Matt. 4:1-11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 20:10).

Creation

We believe the Biblical account of the creation of the physical universe, angels and man; that this account is neither allegory or myth, but a literal, historical account of the direct, immediate creative acts of God without any evolutionary process; that man was created by a direct work of God and not from previously existing forms of life; and that all men are descended from the historical Adam and Eve, first parents of the entire human race (Gen. 1; 2; Col. 1:16,17; John 1:3).

The Fall of Man

We believe that man was created in innocence (in the image and likeness of God) under the law of his Maker, but by voluntary transgression Adam fell from his sinless and happy state, and all men sinned in him, in consequence of which all men are totally depraved, are partakers of Adam's fallen nature, and are sinners by nature and by conduct, and therefore are under just condemnation without defense or excuse (Gen. 3:1-6; Rom. 3:10-19; 5:12, 19; 1:18, 32).

The Virgin Birth

We believe that Jesus was begotten of the Holy Spirit in a miraculous manner, born of Mary, a virgin, as no other person was ever born or can be born of woman, and that He is both the Son of God and God the Son (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:35; John1:14).

Salvation

We believe that the salvation of sinners is divinely initiated and wholly of grace through the mediatorial offices of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who, by the appointment of the Father, voluntarily took upon Himself our nature, yet without sin, and honored the divine law by his personal obedience, thus qualifying Himself to be our Savior; that by the shedding of His blood in His death He fully satisfied the just demands of a holy and righteous God regarding sin; that His sacrifice consisted not in setting us an example by His death as a martyr, but was a voluntary substitution of Himself in the sinner's place, the Just dying for the unjust, Christ the Lord bearing our sins in His own body on the tree; that having risen from the dead He is now enthroned in Heaven, and uniting in His wonderful person the tenderest sympathies with divine perfection, He is in every way qualified to be a suitable, a compassionate and an all-sufficient Savior.

ARTICLE II (Continued)

We believe that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the only condition of salvation. Repentance is a change of mind and purpose toward God prompted by the Holy Spirit and is an integral part of saving faith (Jonah 2:9; Eph. 2:8; Acts 15:11; Rom. 3:24, 25; John 3:16; Matt. 18:11; Phil. 2:7, 8; Heb. 2:14-17; Isa. 53:4-7; I John 4:10; I Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; I Pet. 2:24).

Resurrection and Priesthood of Christ

We believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ and in His ascension into Heaven, where He now sits at the right hand of the Father as our High Priest interceding for us. (Matt. 28:6,7; Luke 24:39; John 20:27; I Cor. 15:4; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:2-6, 51; Acts 1:9-11; Rev. 3:21; Heb. 8:6; 12:2; 7:25; I Tim. 2:5; I John 2:1; Heb. 2:17; 5:9, 10).

Grace and the New Birth

We believe that in order to be saved, sinners must be born again; that the new birth is a new creation in Christ Jesus; that it is instantaneous and not a process; that in the new birth the one dead in trespasses and in sins is made a partaker of the divine nature and receives eternal life, the free gift of God; that the new creation is brought about by our sovereign God in a manner above our comprehension, solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in connection with divine truth, so as to secure our voluntary obedience to the gospel; that its proper evidence appears in the holy fruits of repentance, faith and newness of life (John 3:3; 2 Cor. 5:17; I John 5:1; Acts 16:20-33; 2 Pet. 1:4; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13; John 3:8).

Justification

We believe that justification is that judicial act of God whereby He declares the believer righteous upon the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ; that it is bestowed not in consideration of any work of righteousness which we have done, but solely through faith in the Redeemer's shed blood (Rom. 3:24; 4:5; 5:1, 9; Gal. 2:16; Phil 3:9).

Sanctification

We believe that sanctification is the divine setting apart of the believer unto God accomplished in a threefold manner; first, an eternal act of God, based upon redemption in Christ, establishing the believer in a position of holiness at the moment he trusts the Savior; second, a continuing process in the saint as the Holy Spirit applies the Word of God to the life; third, the final accomplishment of this process at the Lord's return (Heb. 10:10-14; 3:1;

John 17:17; 2 Cor. 3:18; I Cor. 1:30; Eph. 5:25-27; I Thess. 4:3,4; 5:23, 24; I John 3:2; Jude 24, 25; Rev. 22:11).

The Security of the Saints

We believe that all who are truly born again are kept by God the Father for Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6; John 10:28, 29; Rom. 8:35-39; Jude 1).

The Church

We believe that a local church is an organized congregation of immersed believers, associated by covenant of faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the ordinances of Christ; governed by His laws; and exercising the gifts, rights and privileges invested in them by His Word; that its officers are pastors and deacons, whose qualifications, claims and duties are clearly defined in the Scriptures. We believe the true mission of the church is the faithful witnessing of Christ to all men as we have opportunity. We hold that the local church has the absolute right of self-government free from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations; and that the one and only Superintendent is Christ through the Holy Spirit: that it is Scriptural for true churches to cooperate with each other in contending for the faith and for the furtherance of the gospel; that each local church is the sole judge of the measure and method of its cooperation; that on all matters of membership, of polity (principles upon which our church is based, and the way in which we manage it), of government, of discipline, of benevolence, the will of the local church is final (I Cor. 11:2; Acts 20: 17-28; I Tim. 3:1-13; Acts 2:41, 42).

We believe in the unity of all New Testament believers in the Church which is the Body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12, 13; Eph. 1:22, 23; 3:1-6; 4:11; 5:23; Col. 1:18; Acts 15:13-18).

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

We believe that Christian baptism is the single immersion of a believer in water to show forth in a solemn and beautiful emblem our identification with the crucified, buried and risen Savior, through Whom we died to sin and rose to a new life; that baptism is to be performed under the authority of the local church; and that it is a prerequisite to the privileges of church membership.

We believe that the Lord's Supper is the commemoration of His death until He comes, and should be preceded always by solemn self-examination. We believe that the Biblical order of the ordinances is baptism first and then the Lord's Supper, and that participants in the Lord's Supper should be immersed believers (Acts 8:36,38,39; John 3:23; Rom. 6:3-5; Matt. 3:16; Col. 2:12; I Cor. 11:23-28; Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:41, 42).

Separation

We believe in obedience to the Biblical commands to separate ourselves unto God from worldliness and ecclesiastical apostasy (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; I Thess. 1:9, 10; I Tim. 6:3-5; Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9-11).

Civil Government

We believe that civil government is of divine appointment for the interests and good order of human society; that magistrates are to be prayed for, conscientiously honored and obeyed; except in those things opposed to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ Who is the only Lord of the conscience and the coming King of Kings (Rom. 13:1-7; 2 Sam. 23:3; Exod. 18:21,22; Acts 23:5; Matt. 22:21; Acts 5:29; 4:19,20; Dan. 3:17, 18).

Israel

We believe in the sovereign selection of Israel as God's eternal covenant people, that she is now dispersed because of her disobedience and rejection of Christ, and that she will be re-gathered in the Holy Land and, after the completion of the Church, will be saved as a nation at the second advent of Christ (Gen. 13:14-17; Rom. 11:1-32; Ezek. 37).

Rapture and Subsequent Events

We believe in the premillennial return of Christ, an event which can occur at any moment, and that at that moment the dead in Christ shall be raised in glorified bodies, and the living in Christ shall be raised in glorified bodies, and the living in Christ shall be given glorified bodies without tasting death, and shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air before the seven years of the Tribulation (I Thess. 4:13-18; I Cor. 15:42-44, 51-54; Phil. 3:20, 21; Rev. 3:10).

We believe that the Tribulation, which follows the Rapture of the Church, will be culminated by the revelation of Christ in power and great glory to sit upon the throne of David and to establish the millennial kingdom (Dan. 9:25-27; Matt. 24:29-31; Luke 1:30-33; Isa. 9:6,7; 11:1-9; Acts 2:29, 30; Rev. 20:1-4,6).

The Righteous and the Wicked

We believe that there is a radical and essential difference between the righteous and the wicked; that only those who are justified by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and sanctified by the Spirit of our God are truly righteous in His esteem; while all such as continue in impenitence and unbelief are in His sight wicked and under the curse; and this distinction holds among men both in and after death, in the everlasting felicity of the saved and the everlasting conscious suffering of the lost in the Lake of Fire (Mal. 3:18; Gen. 18:23; Rom. 6:17, 18; I John 5:19; Rom. 7:6; 6:23; Prov. 14:32; Luke 16:25; Matt. 25:34-41; John 8:21; Rev. 20:14,15).

ARTICLE III

ASSOCIATION

- Section 1. This church shall not cooperate or fellowship with any organization that permits the presence of modernistic teaching (i.e., any group or organization that denies the fundamentals of the faith) or apostate leadership.
- Section 2. This church shall fellowship with the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches.

ARTICLE IV

PURPOSE

The purpose of this corporation is to glorify God by

1. Honoring Him in worship John 4:24
2. Edifying members Eph. 4:11-12
3. Spreading the Gospel Acts 16:4; 2:47
4. To administer the ordinances of:
 - a) Baptism
 - b) Communion

ARTICLE V

OFFICERS

Section 1. The elected officers of this church are the Pastors and deacons.

Section 2. Qualifications:

- P. 1 Pastors - The Pastors shall meet the Biblical requirements as set forth in I Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9.
- P.2 Deacons - Deacons shall meet the Biblical requirements as set forth in I Timothy 3:1-13, and Acts 6:1-8. Deacons must be at least 21 years of age.

Section 3. Duties of officers:

- P.1 Pastors. It shall be the duty of the Pastors to preach at the church, to administer the ordinances of the church, and perform faithfully the various duties incumbent upon their office. They shall be an ex-officio member of the deacon board and all church committees, and serve as moderator at all church business meetings, except those meetings that pertain to them.
- P.2 Deacons. The term "deacon" means "servant" to the church for the Lord. The term also means "helper" to the Pastors in the church doing the work of the Lord.

The deacons shall appoint their chairman, a church clerk and a church treasurer directly following the annual election. The chairman of the board shall be vice-moderator of the church. They shall have monthly meetings, which time shall be mutually determined by the board. Any deacon being absent from regular monthly board meetings for three months in succession, apart from illness or valid reason, shall be dropped from the board. In the event of a deacon vacancy, the board shall appoint a qualified member to fill the open term, preferably a former deacon, and the congregation shall be notified.

The deacons, together with the Pastor, shall

- (1) assist the Pastor with the ordinance of the Lord's Supper and Baptism;
- (2) assist the Pastor as the discipline committee;
- (3) present an annual budget for adoption which shall include current expenses, pastoral support, and missionary support. The deacons shall be permitted to spend up to the extent of one half of one percent of the annual church budget for any purpose without the vote of the church.

- P.3 The church clerk will be a deacon who is appointed by the deacons for a one year term. The clerk will keep accurate minutes of all business meetings, perform all correspondence regarding the transfer of a church letter or membership changes and can provide a signature for any official church documents.
- P.4 The treasurer is an officer of the church and is appointed by the deacons for a one year term and shall be responsible to oversee the counting and deposit of offerings, keeping accurate and confidential records of giving for members, providing a year end report of all giving to all members, opening and closing bank accounts, arranging and signing for loans, and providing monthly and quarterly financial statements.
- P.5 An officer of the church failing to fulfill the duties of his or her office shall be admonished by the Deacons.

Section 4. Election of Deacons:

- P.1 Nominating Committee. The nominating committee for the annual election of officers shall be composed of the Pastors, two deacons, and two persons elected from the voting membership. The nominating committee shall have begun their work prior to the first Sunday of November.
- P.2 The committee will present a slate of officers two Sundays before the annual election. Any voting member shall have the right to hand in additional nominations. No nominations will be received from the floor.
- P.3 The church year will be January 1 through December 31. The Annual Election will be held preferably the first week of December and the new officers will take office the first Sunday of January. Church officers shall be elected by a majority vote of all members present, 18 years or older. The Annual Business Meeting will be held preferably by January 15th, at which time the budget will be considered and a written report for each department will be submitted. The deacons shall make available a list of persons appointed to serve in leadership positions for the new year. All leadership appointees shall be in full fellowship with this church.
- P.4 Terms of office. Deacons shall be elected each year for a three year term. One year shall lapse before a man may be re-elected to the deacon board. There shall be three or more deacons in this church.

- P.5 Vacancies. The deacon board shall recommend to the church a qualified person, preferably a former deacon, to fill any vacancy. Notice shall be given the preceding Sunday.
- P.6 Absentee ballots will be available upon request at the church office for members in good standing for the election of officers and calling of Pastors.

ARTICLE VI

MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. Reception of members can be by one of three modes (1) Baptism by immersion, (2) Letter, (3) Experience.

- P.1 Any person professing faith in Christ and giving evidence of being born again and adhering to the faith and practice held by this church as set forth in its Confession of Faith, may upon baptism and the recommendation of the board of deacons, be eligible for membership.
- P.2 Members may be received by letter from any other fundamental Baptist church.
- P.3 Persons baptized upon profession of their faith in Christ may be received on their experience and baptism if they can give satisfactory evidence of Christian conduct and scriptural faith.
- P.4 The church shall vote on reception of new members on the recommendation of the deacon board. If there are five dissenting votes, the matter shall be referred to the deacon board and the objection will be considered. If the objection is unfounded or unscriptural, it shall be overruled by a majority vote of the congregation.
- P.5 Members removed from membership rolls will be by vote of the congregation.
- P.6 No person may be a member of the church while he or she is a member of a Secret Society Organization or in opposition to our Confession of Faith.
- P.7 Student Associate Memberships shall be provided for those temporarily residing in the area as a result of educational relationships. Those desiring such status shall be members in good standing of a Baptist church of like faith and practice, and must be received by vote of the church on the recommendation of the deacon board.

MEMBERSHIP

Student Associate Members will retain membership in their home church and not have the right to vote or hold office in this church. They are expected to maintain the same standard of conduct as a full member.

Student Associate Memberships will terminate automatically when the student leaves the area, or it may be terminated earlier by the deacon board.

Section 2. Duties of Members:

- P.1 The duties of members to themselves are the acquisition of spiritual knowledge, constant progress in spirituality, following Peter's admonition to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."
- P.2 Members shall honor, esteem, and pray for their Pastor.
- P.3 It is the duty of each member to cultivate and cherish brotherly love for all members of the church, and to show this love.
- P.4 Toward those who are not members of the church, it is the duty of the members to be exact in fulfilling obligations and performing promises, and as ability may enable, to commend the Gospel of Christ unto them.
- P.5 It is the duty of all members moving from this city and immediate vicinity to take letters of commendation to other Baptist churches of the same faith and order.
- P.6 It is the duty of each member to uphold the church in tithes and offerings, (I Cor. 16:2; II Cor. 9:6), and in faithfulness to its services. Each member shall be at every business meeting when possible.
- P.7 It is expected that members will practice separation in their personal life, separation from the world, and unto God.
- P.8 All members in good standing, eighteen years of age or older, shall be eligible to vote. All members in good standing, twenty-one years of age or older, shall be eligible to hold office.

Section 3. Discipline of Members:

The discipline of members will be according to Biblical exhortation. The board of deacons shall serve as the discipline committee.

- a. The goal of discipline is restoration. (Gal. 6:1)
- b. The method will be according to Matthew 18:15-17.
- P.1 If a person has been absent from the church for a period of one year, he shall be visited by the deacons to discuss the problem. If a Pastor is on staff, a reasonable effort will be made for a Pastoral visit. If no valid reason can be given for the long absence and no intention of return is evident, that member's name will be recommended for removal from the membership roll.
- P.2 If a person is charged with conduct that injures or damages the testimony of the church, that same person shall meet with the deacons to see if said accusations are true. If the charges are found to be true, that person shall be lovingly admonished to return to conduct that reflects Biblical standards. If the accused refuses, that party's name shall be dropped from the church roll.

ARTICLE VII

CALLING AND DISMISSING A PASTOR

Section 1. Calling a Pastor:

- P.1 The deacon board shall service as the pulpit committee. They shall contact as many pulpit supplies as they deem necessary.
- P.2 The deacons will investigate potential candidates in matters of fellowship, education, and doctrine.
- P.3 The church shall hear and vote on one candidate before hearing any others.
- P.4 The vote shall be secret.
- P.5 A quorum must be present that is equal to twenty percent of the eligible membership.
- P.6 A three-fourths vote of absentee ballots and members present and eligible to vote shall constitute a call.
- P.7 Deacons will count the vote.

Section 2. Dismissal of a Pastor. If a majority of the deacon board feels the Pastor's ministry is finished, they may call for a special business meeting for the purpose of taking a vote of confidence. Notice of such a meeting shall be given on two Sundays immediately preceding the meeting. At such a meeting, it shall be stated that a vote of confidence has been called for, but shall allow no public discussion of the matter and shall proceed to take a vote by secret ballot. A two-thirds vote of the members present shall be necessary to give a vote of confidence, which shall mean that the minister may continue his duties. Should the vote not be sustained, it shall thereby be due notice to the Pastor that his term of office shall cease at a time not more than two months hence. The deacons shall have the authority to terminate the Pastor's ministry at any time within the two month's period should they deem it to be for the best interest of the church. In such a case, the full two month's salary shall be paid. Any other financial considerations must be taken to the church for a vote.

In other cases, such as heresy, dereliction of duty, immorality an exit interview will be conducted and a severance package will be established by the deacon board. In such a case, not more than the two month's salary will be paid.

Section 3. Absentee ballots will be available upon request at the church office for members in good standing.

ARTICLE VIII

MEETINGS OF THE CHURCH

- Section 1. Stated Services. The church shall maintain Sunday school, morning and evening worship services, and midweek services. The deacon board shall have the authority to make exceptions to these services.
- Section 2. The Lord's Supper shall be observed once a month, preferably the first Sunday of the month. Communion shall be open to all born again believers in Jesus Christ. Since absence from the Lord's table either through carelessness, neglect, or deliberate act reveals a decline in one's spiritual life, it will be the obligation of the deacons or Pastor to contact the same and report the reasons for such negligence.
- Section 3. Business Meetings:
- P.1 Quarterly Meetings. The Quarterly Business Meeting shall be held before the 15th of April, July, and October. The fourth meeting will be the Annual Business Meeting.
 - P.2 Annual Election. The election of officers shall be held the first week of December so that the new officers may prepare to take office on the first Sunday of January.
 - P.3 Annual Business Meeting. The church year is January 1 through December 31. The Annual Meeting shall take place by January 15th. Annual reports and the adoption of the budget shall be included in this meeting.
 - P.4 Special Meetings. Special meetings may be called by the Pastor or deacons. Notice of such meetings shall be given at least one Sunday in advance of the meeting at which time the purpose of the meeting shall be stated. No business other than announced business shall be discussed.
 - P.5 Roberts Rules of Order shall govern church business meetings.
 - P.6 All meetings must have a quorum, that is equal to twenty percent of the eligible membership, in order to execute business.

ARTICLE IX

FINANCES

- Section 1. The church shall be solely financed by tithes, offerings and gifts.
- Section 2. The treasurer is appointed by the deacons for a one year term and shall be responsible to oversee the counting and deposit of offerings, keeping accurate and confidential records of giving for members, providing a year end report of all giving to all members, and providing monthly and quarterly financial statements.

ARTICLE X

STAFFING

- Section 1. Additional Pastoral or Ministry staff. Additional staff may be added or replaced at the recommendation of the Pastors to the deacons. They would be responsible solely to the Pastor charged with the administration of the church. The deacons would recommend to the congregation approval of any required funding, and the congregation would be responsible to approve recommended expenditure changes for these staff positions. Established salaries would be reviewed each year at budget time.
- Section 2. Clerical Staff. Church secretary positions are responsible to the Pastor. The Pastor and deacons shall hire or replace for this position as required.
- Section 3. Custodial Staff. Custodial staff is responsible to the deacons, and the deacons will hire or replace for this position as required.

ARTICLE XI

AMENDMENTS TO CONSTITUTION

- Section 1. The constitution may be amended by a two-third's vote of members present eligible to vote at an annual business meeting or at a special business meeting. In either case, notice of a proposed change must be given two weeks in advance.